

NFL DRAFT

MARK INGRAM—
THE NEXT EMMITT?

OVECHKIN CONVERSATION
THE IMPORTANCE OF WINNING THE BIG ONE



Sporting News

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7 CONSECUTIVE
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11 CHAMPIONSHIPS

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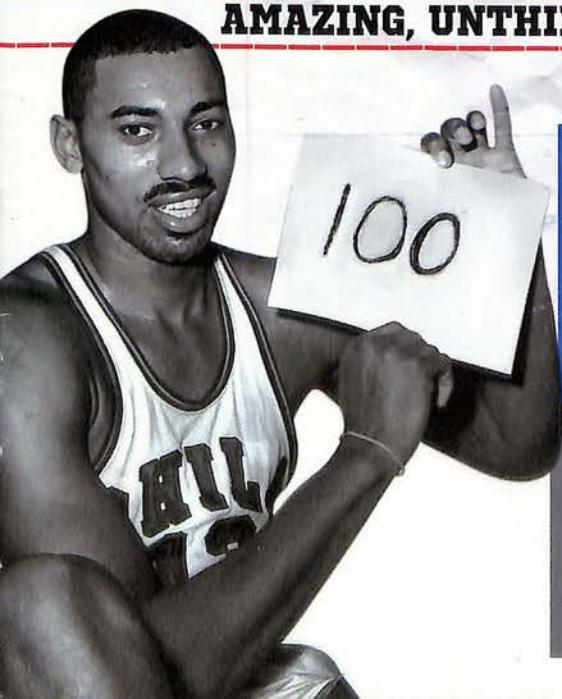
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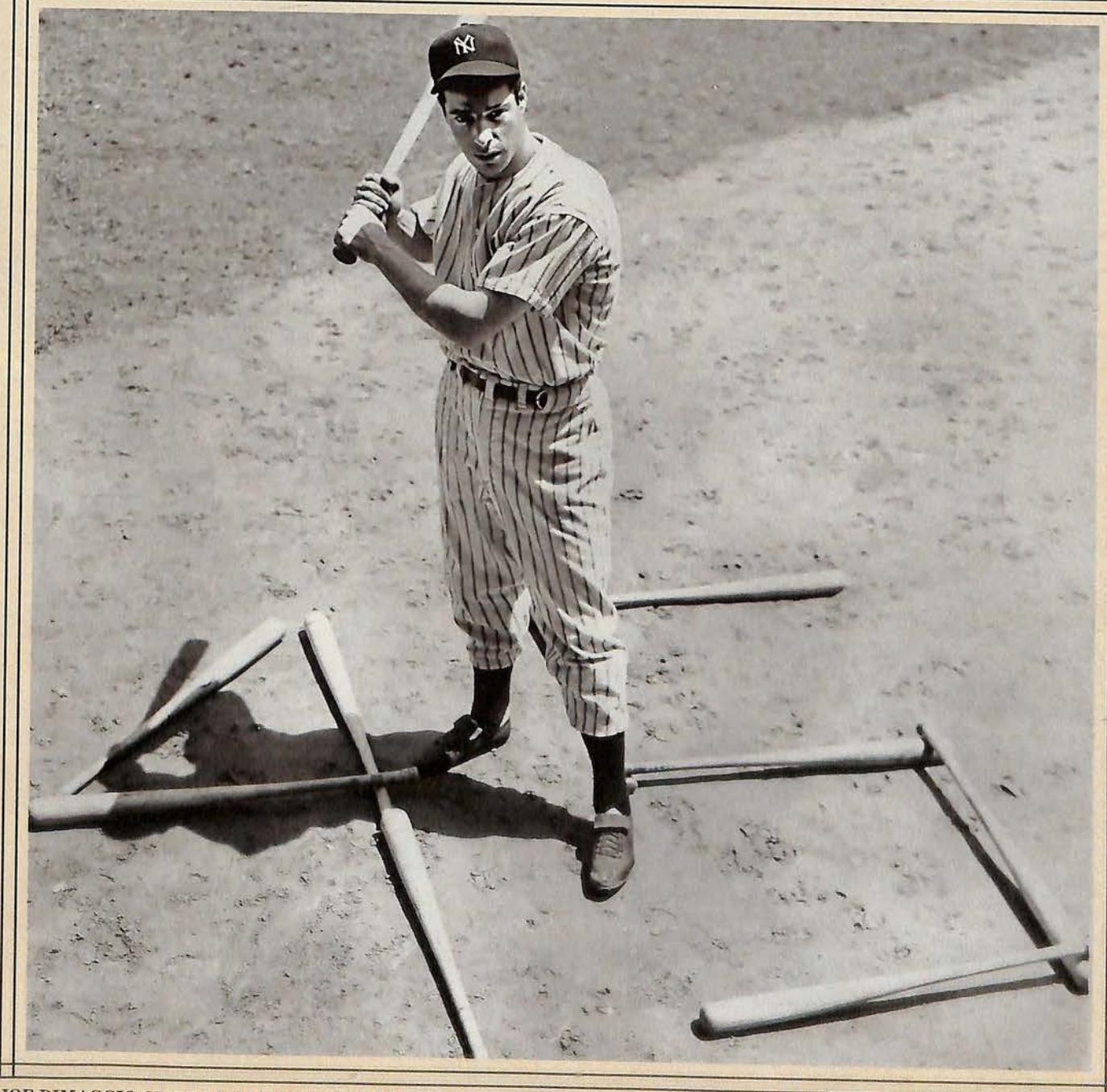
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GREAT SPORTS DEBATE NO. 4: THE GREATEST RECORDS

45 was a magic number—until Joltin' Joe came along



JOE DIMAGGIO OF THE 1941 NEW YORK YANKEES

DIMAGGIO: SN ARCHIVES



DiMaggio's
56-game
hitting
streak tops
our ranking
of sports
records

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Wilt's 100:
A teammate
remembers an
unimaginable
game

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04.25.2011



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BY KEITH WOOD / SN

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Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak ranks No. 1 in SN's top 10. "It's something I really don't think will ever be broken with the depth of pitching there is now," says Robin Ventura, who had a 58-game streak in college.

24 NBA PLAYOFFS: THE ENFORCER

The Thunder look like postsezon contenders thanks to the defense and physical play of deadline-day addition Kendrick Perkins. "He plays with a lot of anger," says Thunder coach Scott Brooks.

—BY SEAN DEVENEY

28 SN CONVERSATION: ALEX OVECHKIN

Capitals star winger Alex Ovechkin isn't as concerned with scoring goals as he is with reaching them. "I want to be like Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant—the kind of people who won championships." —BY CRAIG CUSTANCE

48 BASKETBALL RECRUITING: GROUP SHOTS

The Jordan Brand Classic featured multiple signees from Kentucky, Duke, North Carolina and Syracuse. "We talk all the time about next year," says Kentucky recruit Marquis Teague.

—BY RYAN FAGAN

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42 BASEBALL: DOWN ON THE FARM...FOR NOW

First baseman Eric Hosmer is among six highly touted prospects who could make the jump to the big leagues this season. "His time frame has moved up," says Royals general manager J.J. Picollo.

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NFL DRAFT: CATCH-22

Some say Alabama's Mark Ingram will never be one of the NFL's great running backs because he lacks speed. "If he had that, he'd be a top 10 pick," says a former general manager.

—BY CLIFTON BROWN



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COMING SOON: THE OVERLOOKED YANKEE

Second baseman Robinson Cano gets overshadowed by big-name stars Alex Rodriguez and Derek Jeter, but find out why he's one of the best all-around players in the game today.

Multimedia



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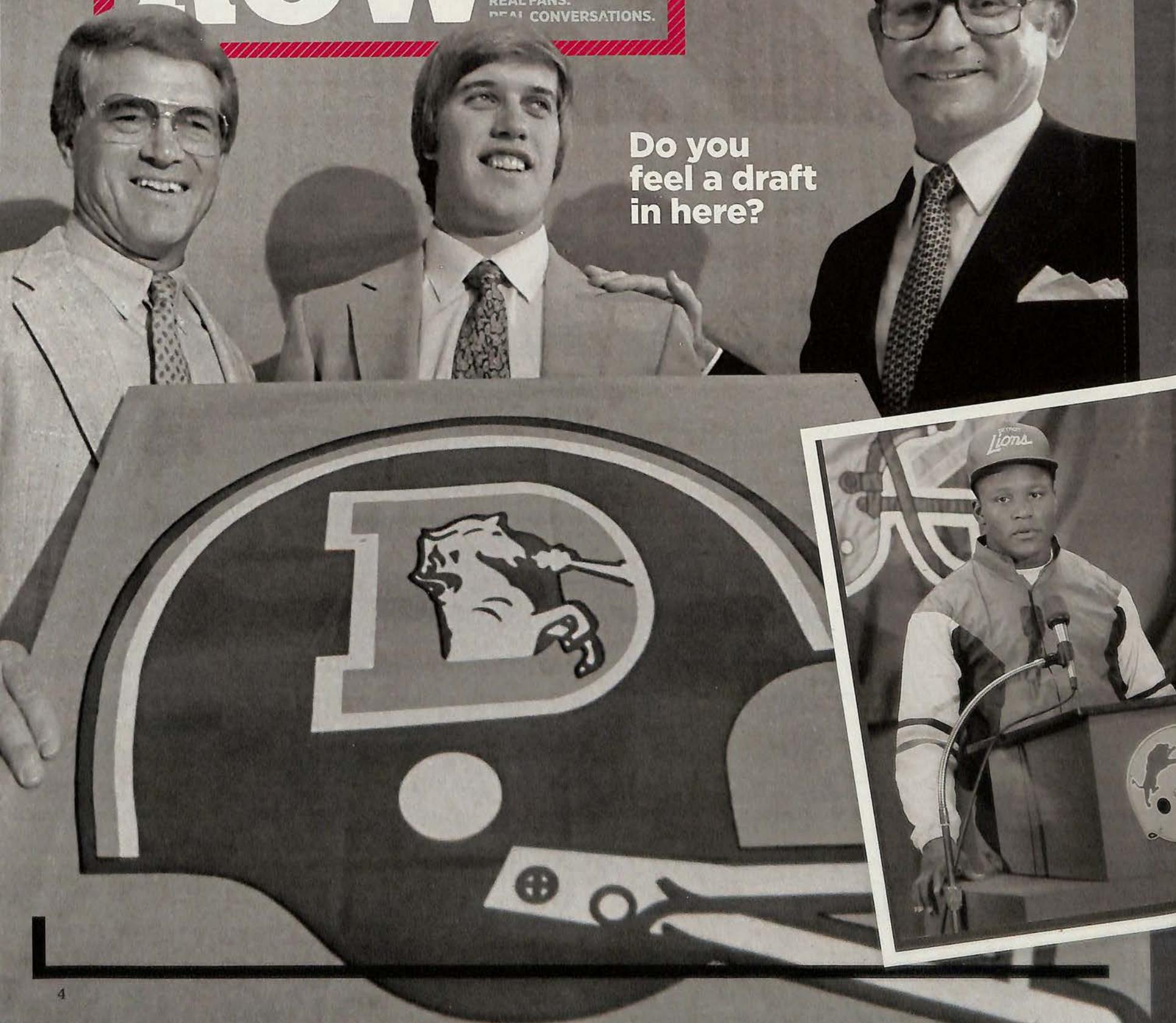
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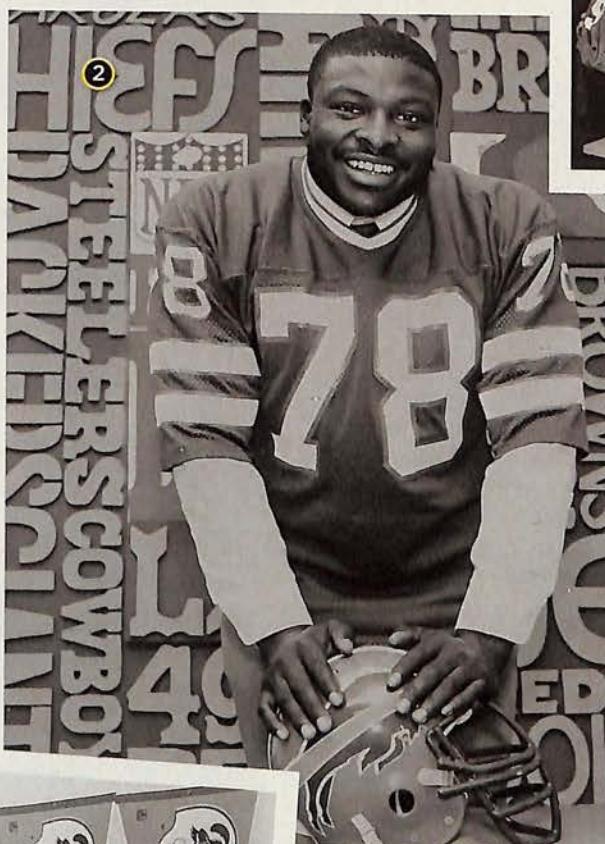
Do you
feel a draft
in here?



IN PICTURES

PICKY, PICKY

Hall of Fame or bust, it's all there—in black and white—in the NFL draft's first round. In 1983, Broncos coach Dan Reeves (far left) and owner Edgar Kaiser knew they'd gotten something—from the Colts—in John Elway, but what? In '89, Barry Sanders started a Lions career he ended with 15,269 yards, but who knew? In '76, Lee Roy Selmon was the first No. 1 pick for the expansion Bucs and owner Hugh Culverhouse. Three No. 1s, three Hall of Famers. Easy, right?



[1] From the moment a team makes a player its top pick, his days are numbered—if only for the draft-day jersey photo ops—as he begins the road to fame ... or infamy. After the Cowboys took future Hall of Famer Troy Aikman No. 1 overall in 1989 (page 9), the Packers went with tackle Tony Mandarich, who went from The Incredible Bulk on draft day with coach Lindy Infante to The Incredible Bust. In 1992, the Colts made defensive end Steve Emtman the top pick, and he was out of the league after six seasons and eight career sacks.

[2] Bruce Smith filled the bill for Buffalo in 1985, starting a Hall of Fame career in which he helped anchor the team's defense and dominance of the AFC—though Super Bowls were another matter.

[3] Heisman winner Earl Campbell—with commissioner Pete Rozelle in New York—went to Houston as 1978's No. 1 overall, and defenders would get used to seeing the back of that Oilers jersey. He rushed for 9,407 yards in a Hall of Fame career.

[4] Draft day can be dicey, even when you're picking a Texan named Sims first overall. Taken in 1980, Billy (far left, with Lions coach Monte Clark), who grew up in Hooks, was brilliant in a too-brief career ended by injury. Taken in 1982, Kenneth (below, with Patriots coach Ron Meyer), born in Kosse, never lived up to expectations.

5 QUESTIONS FOR...

MARK BUEHRLE

Mark Buehrle has been eternally consistent and often brilliant in his career with the White Sox. He has made at least 30 starts and thrown at least 200 innings for 10 consecutive seasons. He has crafted a perfect game and a no-hitter, and he owns the major league record of 45 consecutive outs. He has started an All-Star Game and a World Series game, and he has even saved a 14-inning World Series marathon. More recently, he answered questions from *Sporting News* readers.



It's great when you kind of get drafted out of nowhere and don't expect to make it. And with the career I've had, it's a surprise to myself.

1 > So, can we expect another no-hitter or perfect game from you? You seem to throw them in odd-numbered years.

— *2ndHalfAdjustments*, via SouthSideSox.com

BUEHRLE: (Laughs.) No chance. And even if I did have something like that going, Ozzie (Guillen) and the guys have joked that they might pull me before it's over because it seems like every time I've thrown one of those, even though it's a great accomplishment, as a team we've kind of gone downhill after that. So they're joking that if I get to 8½ innings and have a perfect game, he might just come out there and pull me.

2 > After that incredible between-the-legs flip to first base on opening day last year, what amazing athletic feat do you have planned for this season?

— *Chad Cunningham*, St. Louis, via Facebook

BUEHRLE: I don't know that I'm going to be able to top that. People have joked around, asked me, "Hey, what are you gonna do? What do you have planned?" and I tell them, "I didn't have that one planned, either." It was one of those reaction plays where you run to the ball and do whatever you can to get the guy out.

3 > Was the ball from the last out of the perfect game flipped for charity or a new deer blind?

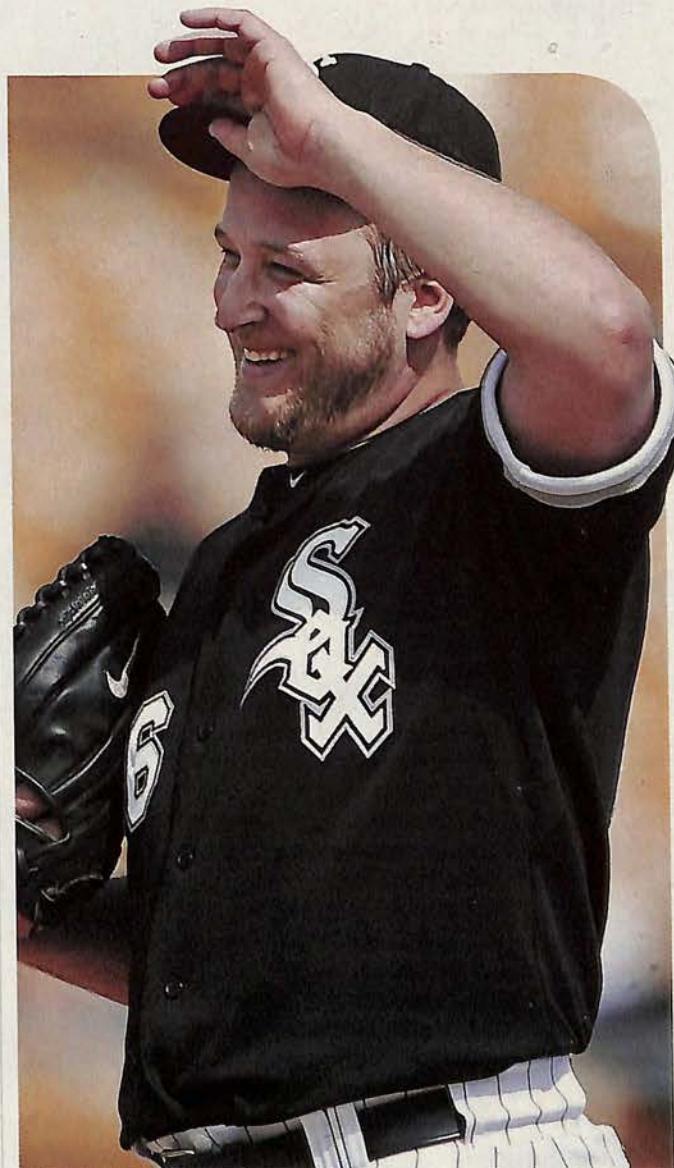
— *John Dowling*, Santa Ana, Calif., via SouthSideSox.com

BUEHRLE: I do have that one, along with a couple of other baseballs—the last out of my save in the World Series, my first hit, my first home run and the record ball for the consecutive outs. Those are the five balls I have in the display case at home. They're in a baseball diamond shape, with one at each base, and then one on the pitcher's mound. So that's on one side as you go into the basement, and on the other side I have all my rings. There's the World Series ring, and then Jerry (Reinsdorf) gave me and my dad rings for the perfect game and the no-hitter, and I have one from when we won the championship in A-ball my first year.

4 > Thin-crust pizza or thick-crust pizza?

— *David Mayer*, Kirkwood, Mo., via Facebook

BUEHRLE: I've gotta go with thin. Thick is too doughy for me. I used to work at a Pizza Hut back in the day, and the thick pizza there was always doughy in the middle. I always have that in my mind from when I worked there. I mean, I'll eat it, but I'm more of a thin-crust guy.



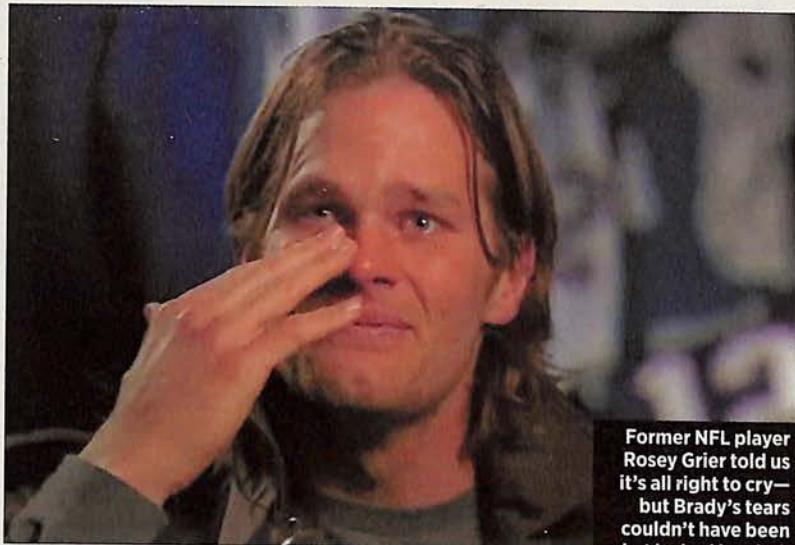
5 > Do you see yourself as the greatest 38th-round draft pick in the history of sports?

— *Winningugly*, via SouthSideSox.com

BUEHRLE: I don't know if anybody else has made it who's been drafted that round. I know Mike Piazza was drafted in like the 62nd round or something. But I don't really consider myself great, anyway. I just go out there and try to get people out. It's great when you kind of get drafted out of nowhere and don't expect to make it. And with the career I've had, it's a surprise to myself. I got drafted in the 38th round and went back to college before I ended up signing. If I would have gone back into the draft, they were projecting me as a fifth-round pick. Yes, I was a 38th-round pick, but if I would have just waited and not signed right away with the White Sox, I could have been a fifth-round draft pick.

— *Ryan Fagan*

WILL'S WORLD



Former NFL player Rosey Grier told us it's all right to cry—but Brady's tears couldn't have been what he had in mind.

A CRYING SHAME

WHEN AN ATHLETE'S LACK OF PERSPECTIVE DISSOLVES INTO TEARS



Will Leitch is the author of four books, including *Are We Winning? Fathers and Sons in the New Golden Age of Baseball*. He is the founding editor of Deadspin and a contributing editor at New York magazine. Get more of his opinions at leitch.tumblr.com.

I am not easily bewildered by things athletes do. They're different from you and me, not just physically but emotionally. They have been told since they were extremely young that they are special, that they are unique, and they have been coddled accordingly. This doesn't make them bad people. It just makes them different.

So you have to take this into account when an athlete comes across as a braggart or out of touch with his fans or money-grubbing or any of that. Often he lacks the basic fundamental coping skills the rest of us have been forced to develop, thanks to our lack of physical superiority. It makes it easier for us to avoid disappointment.

Which brings me to crying. Specifically, Tom Brady's crying. In an interview with a major sports network—no guessing which!—Brady recalled not being picked until the sixth round of the 2000 NFL draft. Now being picked in the sixth round of the draft would be a life highlight for you, me

and just about everyone we know. (It'd be a bit baffling, though; that Wonderlic test, man, it's just an eternal struggle.) If someone you knew were selected in the sixth round of the NFL draft, that would be how you introduced him to everyone else you knew, for the rest of both of your lives. "This is Jim. He was drafted in the sixth round of the NFL draft. Isn't that amazing?" And you, Jim and the person would nod your heads, agreeing, *That's just amazing*.

But Tom Brady, he cried just thinking about it. "When the Patriots called, I was so excited—I was like, 'I don't have to be an insurance salesman!'" he told the major sports network. Putting aside that being an insurance salesman is a perfectly respectable job—though it does lower your exposure to supermodels—it was difficult to understand. Who cries when they're not drafted as high as they wanted? Who cries when they even think about it?

Do not get me wrong: I find nothing wrong with an athlete crying. We live in an era of controlled public personas; crying in public is often seen less as a spontaneous display of emotion and more as a breakdown, a loss of the control we require of our respected public figures. But I think it's great. Most people on television are fake. Rarely is there anything about crying that is fake. It's too real. (Adam Morrison, for one, will never be seen the same way, for better or worse.)

But, heavens to Betsy, if you're crying thinking about that brief second of human history when the planet did not yet recognize that you are, in fact, as awesome as you really are ... man, I'd hate to see Tom Brady watch the end of *Toy Story 3*. Brady is an incredible quarterback, one of the best quarterbacks any of us will ever see. He is a joy to watch play football. But come on. May I recommend some sort of quarterback-insurance salesman exchange program for a day or two, so that some clearly needed perspective is obtained? Maybe a Take Your Quarterback to Work Day? Considering what's going on with the NFL labor situation, Brady should have plenty of time on his hands. People might have to live without football for a few months, but the insurance business, it never rests.

PEOPLE OF THE FORTNIGHT

PHIL JACKSON. It's kind of ridiculous that the Lakers coach is going for his fourth three-peat. That doesn't seem possible. Four of them? One is enough to be a legend. Three's downright gluttonous!

MANNY RAMIREZ. I know everyone's piling on Manny right now, but as someone who doesn't work himself into

much of a lather about PEDs—sorry, but I kind of liked baseball in the '90s and would rather not have to pretend that era didn't happen—I'm just going to remember him as the giddily weird curio that he was. Thinking of Manny's confused, single-minded lunacy still makes me giggle a bit. I hope the baseball world will someday come back around to the same thing.



BOLD, DARING PREDICTIONS

1. If you are able to find the NHL playoffs on your television, you are absolutely going to love them. But you're totally not going to find them.

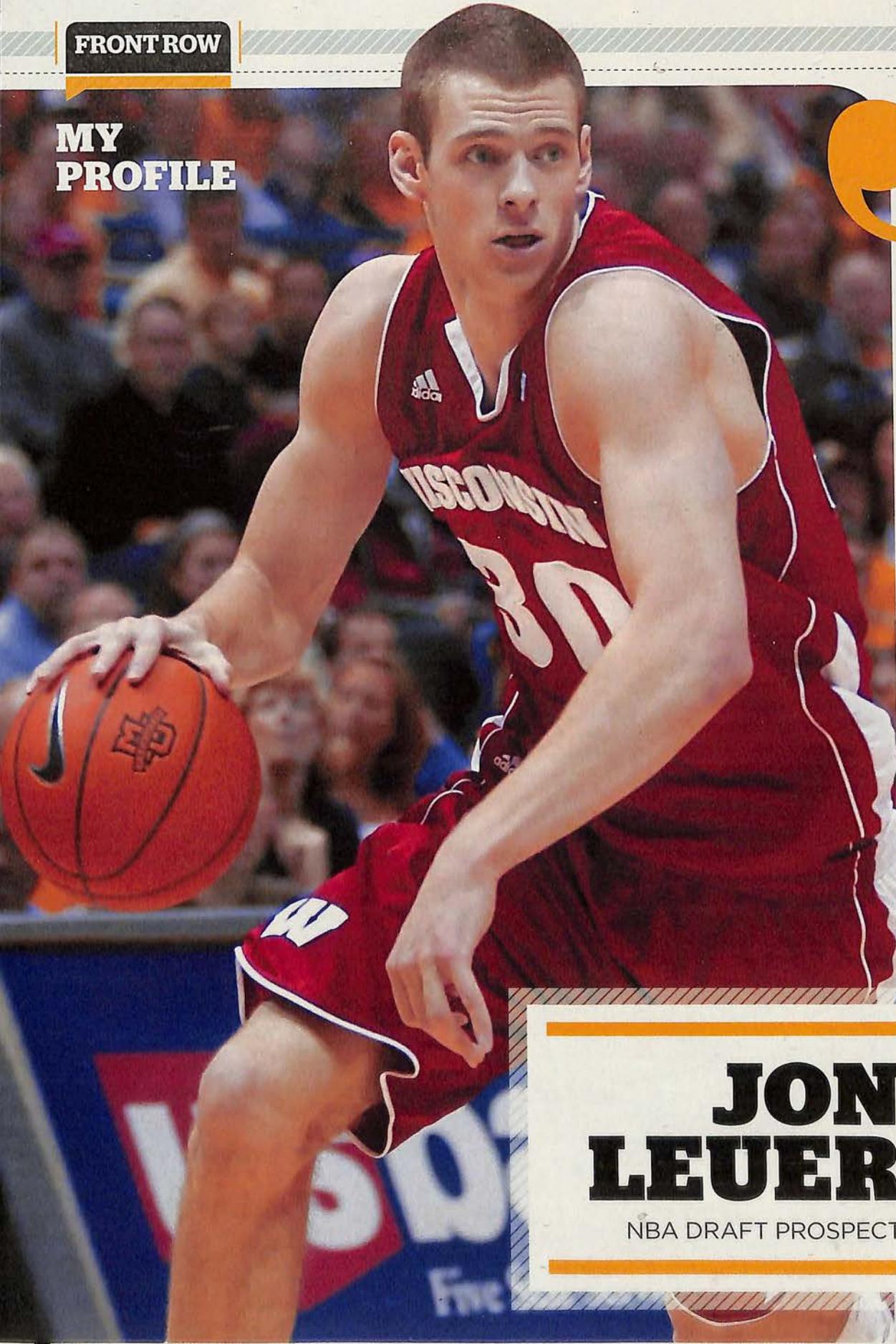


The last thing the NBA wants is for Donaghy's name to be mentioned.

2. At some point during the NBA playoffs, there's going to be a terrible call—though the officiating generally has been better this year—and some broadcaster is going to say the name Tim Donaghy. That guy's going to haunt the league forever.

3. I'll unveil my destination for a baseball trip in the next issue; thank you for all your entries. (Seriously, you folks are awesome.) This week, I'm going to try to figure out precisely how you feel about this NFL labor war. If you were in a room with commissioner Roger Goodell and players union executive director DeMaurice Smith (or at least he was before the union decertified), what would you say to both of them? Or one of them? You will send me your strong words to will@deadspin.com. Don't hold back; it's only e-mail, after all.

MY PROFILE



JON LEUER

NBA DRAFT PROSPECT

Born: May 14, 1989, in Long Lake, Minn.**Status:** Single**Alma mater:** Wisconsin**What's on TV:** *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, SportsCenter, Entourage***What's in my iPod:** I'm eclectic. I have everything from Lil Wayne to Dave Matthews Band to Brad Paisley.**What I drive:** A 2003 white Suburban**Favorite flicks:** *The Godfather, Dumb & Dumber, The Shawshank Redemption***What I'm reading:** I just finished Vince Flynn's *Pursuit of Honor*.**Magazine subscriptions:** We get *Sports Illustrated* at our apartment.**Bookmarks:** Facebook, Twitter, CNN.com and UWBadgers.com**Superstitions:** I don't really have any.**Worst habit:** I hit the snooze button too many times. Or maybe my golf swing.**On my office walls:** A Minnesota Twins poster, a framed photo of Michael Jordan's last shot with the Bulls, a poster of *The Godfather* and a Muhammad Ali poster**Would love to trade places for a day with** ... Golf legend, ESPN analyst and Badger supporter Andy North**First job:** I worked at MDB (Minnesota Developmental Basketball). I would go for basketball lessons and then do custodial duties like cleaning. I was about 16 years old and probably made around \$8 to \$10 an hour.**Favorite meal:** Probably my mom's pot roast. She makes beef, potatoes, carrots, the whole thing.**Talent I'd most like to have:** Tiger Woods' golf game**Favorite athlete to watch in another sport:** Adrian Peterson**Dream date:** Brooklyn Decker**Favorite city to visit:** Chicago**Favorite teams as a kid:** Minnesota Twins and Vikings**Greatest love:** Family and basketball**Favorite physical attribute about myself:** I don't know. I'll say the guns.**And least:** My big toes. They're a little crooked.**Favorite value in others:** Loyalty**My hero:** Michael Jordan**My bucket list:** Skydiving, attend the Masters and play Augusta, win an NBA championship.**My motto:** Every day is a new opportunity, so don't waste it.

YOUR TURN

Got someone you'd like us to go after? Let us know on Facebook, send us a tweet @SportingNews or e-mail kbradley@sportingnews.com.

THE WAY WE WERE

THE CHOSEN 1s

NOT MANY PLAYERS GET TO HEAR THE COMMISSIONER CALL THEIR NAMES ON DRAFT DAY, AND EVEN FEWER GET TO BE THE FIRST. SO WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE AT THE HEAD OF THE CLASS?

Since the first NFL draft in 1936, 75 players have been taken No. 1. Thirteen have been inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and another 34 have made the Pro Bowl. With another player set to join the group, *Sporting News* caught up with four former No. 1s to talk about their draft experiences:

TROY AIKMAN

UCLA quarterback picked No. 1 by the Cowboys in 1989

My last college game was the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. The Cowboys had the No. 1 draft pick that year, so coach Tom Landry, Tex Schramm and Gil Brandt came to our practices that week at Texas Stadium. There was a lot of speculation that I was going to be the first pick, and coach Terry Donahue was worried because of all the attention I was getting.

I didn't have a particularly good practice one day, and Gil Brandt called me one morning and said, "Look, you could go out and throw seven interceptions in the Cotton Bowl and it won't matter. We're going to take you with the first pick."

We won the game, beating Arkansas, 17-3. A few weeks after that, I went to the Combine in Indianapolis. While I was there, I was asked to meet with one of the Cowboys' scouts. He's asking me all sorts of questions—"Do you have any brothers or sisters? You graduated from Henryetta (Okla.) High School, and then what happened?"—and acting like he doesn't really know who I am.

After about 10 minutes, I said,

"I need to ask you a question. I was at the Cotton Bowl a few weeks ago, and Gil Brandt told me then that I was going to be the Cowboys' No. 1 pick. I'm a little confused because now I'm sitting here being interviewed by you, and you act like you don't even know who I am. I'm just wondering what's going on." So he says, "Well, sometimes things are said that shouldn't be said."

Then we hear that there's some guy from Arkansas who's going to be buying the Cowboys. So it went from me talking with Gil Brandt, Tex Schramm and Coach Landry at one point to, before we even got to the draft, there's a new owner—Jerry Jones—and both Tex and Coach Landry are gone. And Jimmy Johnson, who tried recruiting me to both Oklahoma State and then Miami when I was transferring from Oklahoma to UCLA—a guy I had known since I was 17—is being brought in as the head coach.

We began negotiations before the draft. There were times when the Cowboys threatened to not draft me. There was talk that they were going to take Tony Mandarich if we couldn't reach an agreement. But being the No. 1 pick was important to me, and I signed a few days before the draft.

At that time, there were changes not only in the Cowboys organization but also within the league. The NFL commissionership was about to pass from Pete Rozelle to Paul Tagliabue, and this was

the last year Rozelle would preside over the draft.

I went to New York for the draft, but there were no other players there. At that time, the only players who actually attended the draft were the No. 1 picks who had already signed before the draft.

So I was the last player to stand there at the draft and shake hands with Pete Rozelle, which was kind of cool. To be in New York and come out with Pete Rozelle and hold up the Cowboys jersey was a big moment. I loved it.

—As told to Dennis Dillon

TOMMY NOBIS

Texas linebacker picked No. 1 by the Falcons and No. 5 by the AFL's Oilers in 1966

The AFL and NFL were bidding against each other. I was living in a fantasy world for a while because football was so important to me, and here I was, right in the middle of the AFL-NFL battle. That situation has never arisen again in my life, having two business entities bidding for my services.

Back then, the salaries were not that big, but they paid bonuses. They were talking about, because I was from Texas, I might be interested in ranching. They talked about everything from land deals to cattle deals to whatever. I had to be honest with them—I hadn't spent too much time on a horse.

I don't remember the amount of the bonus that I



Aikman's big moment came in the last draft of the Rozelle era.

got, but it was big for a kid coming out of San Antonio, in a family where my mom and dad had to work hard to make ends meet. I was able to buy a new house for my mom and dad. We were South Siders growing up. The North Side was where the big money was. When it came time for me to be able to help them with a home, my parents wanted to be right where they had been all their lives, on the south side of San Antonio. It was the most meaningful thing materialwise I've ever been able to do for my mother.

—As told to Matt Crossman

WALT PATULSKI

Notre Dame defensive end picked No. 1 by the Bills in 1972

Pat McGroder was the G.M. at the time. He called me about three days prior to the draft. They wanted me to fly to Buffalo, but they didn't want me talking about it to anybody.

There was a little subterfuge around it. I flew up to Buffalo

under another name the day before the draft. They picked me up at the airport, and I didn't even stay at a hotel. I stayed at McGroder's house. It was cloak-and-dagger. We flew down to New York City the morning of the draft.

—As told to Matt Crossman

BRUCE SMITH

Virginia Tech defensive end picked No. 1 by the Bills in 1985

I was aware two months ahead of time that they were going to take me No. 1. It came down to myself and Ray Childress.

We had already started talks and negotiations, but we didn't finish until after the draft. When I was introduced as the first pick, I can't tell you the emotions and feelings and thoughts that were in my mind at the time. The moment itself was so surreal. The moment was bigger than anything I could have ever possibly imagined.

—As told to Matt Crossman



SPORTING NEWS COVERS

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NEXT GEN

COLLEGE FOOTBALL RECRUITING

THE CLASS OF 2012:
SN'S ALL-DEFENSE TEAMDE MARIO EDWARDS, 6-4/275
Ryan (Denton, Texas)

NEXT LEVEL: Edwards is going to do something most Texas blue-chippers don't do—he's leaving the state. He committed to Florida State in March. "What I think will make me a good player in college is my ability to chase from the backside and my pass rush," Edwards says.

DT DANNY O'BRIEN, 6-3/280
Powers Catholic (Flint, Mich.)

NEXT LEVEL: O'Brien has options: Illinois, Michigan, Michigan State, Pitt and Tennessee are a few. "(Coaches say) they like my first step off the ball and my quickness and my effort until the whistle is blown," O'Brien says.

DT JORDAN WATKINS, 6-5/260
Woodward Academy (College Park, Ga.)

NEXT LEVEL: Among his offers are Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Ohio State and Oklahoma. "I can play both end and tackle, which would allow them to move me around on the field and change defensive packages without bringing different people (off) the sideline," Watkins says.

DE NOAH SPENCE, 6-4/245
Bishop McDevitt (Harrisburg, Pa.)

NEXT LEVEL: Spence is a talented pass rusher who could end up staying close to home at a school such as Penn State—or head cross-country to a program such as USC. Most of the SEC schools want him, too.

LB KWON ALEXANDER, 6-2/215
Oxford (Ala.)

NEXT LEVEL: Alabama and Auburn want the playmaking Alexander, as do many of the nation's other top programs.

LB TIM COLE, 6-2/215
Brenham (Texas)

NEXT LEVEL: Cole recently gave his commitment to Texas, joining prep teammate Malcom Brown, a defensive tackle. "What

coaches love about me is my vision and knack for the ball, my sideline to sideline speed and how I'm a good downhill runner," Cole says.

LB KAIWAN LEWIS, 6-2/230
St. Joseph (Hammonton, N.J.)

NEXT LEVEL: Not everyone agrees where Lewis fits best, inside or outside, but he'll be a demon regardless of where he lines up. Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia are in the mix to get him, as are schools closer to home, including Connecticut, Boston College and Rutgers. "Coaches say they love my ability to use my hands to get off blocks and the hard hits," Lewis says. "They like my speed at the position."

LB REGGIE RAGLAND, 6-4/245
Bob Jones (Madison, Ala.)

NEXT LEVEL: He ended his recruitment late last December, choosing Alabama over Auburn. "Coaches love that I am a student of the game, that I always know what's going on and I read defenses well," Ragland says.

DB LANDON COLLINS, 6-0/200
Dutchtown (Geismar, La.)

NEXT LEVEL: Collins lives in LSU's backyard, but Alabama, Tennessee and USC would love to nab this talented safety.

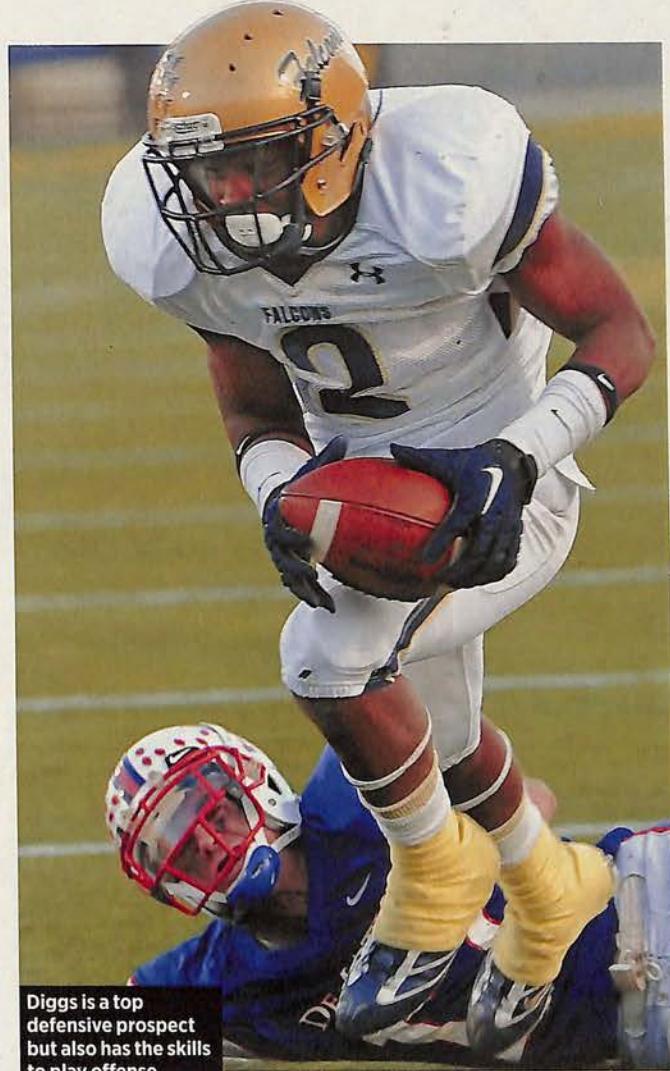
DB STEFON DIGGS, 6-0/190
Good Counsel (Olney, Md.)

NEXT LEVEL: Diggs could play safety, cornerback, receiver or maybe even running back and be productive. Nearby schools Maryland, Virginia Tech, Rutgers and Pitt are potential destinations, but many of the nation's powers also are pursuing him.

DB SHAG THOMPSON, 6-2/210
Grant Union (Sacramento)

NEXT LEVEL: Thompson lives right up the highway from Cal, so the Bears are a serious threat to land him. But don't count out USC and UCLA—or BCS runner-up Oregon.

— Brian McLaughlin



Diggs is a top defensive prospect but also has the skills to play offense.

Two more to remember

Specialists and prospects who are labeled athletes because they could line up at many positions often receive less recruiting hype than their counterparts on offense and defense, but they can be just productive at the next level. Two such players who shouldn't be overlooked in this class:

K/P MARSHALL MORGAN, 6-3/195
Archbishop McCarthy (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.)

NEXT LEVEL: It's not often a kicker/punter gets this much attention this early, but Morgan, who committed to Georgia in January, is too special to ignore. He was 15-of-16 on field goal attempts as a junior, with a long of 53 yards. He also averaged 43.8 yards on punts and put all but three kickoffs through the end zone for touchbacks.

ATH KENYAN DRAKE, 6-1/195
Hillgrove (Powder Springs, Ga.)

NEXT LEVEL: Drake could wind up at running back, receiver, kick returner or on defense. One of the top prospects in Georgia, he committed to Alabama in February. His all-around ability will get him on the field early.

— Brian McLaughlin

EXIT POLL

IN OR OUT?

Barry Bonds' home run marks of 73 in a season and 762 in a career didn't make the cut for *Sporting News'* 10 greatest sports records, but the achievements are historic nonetheless. He also holds the records for most MVPs (seven), walks in a career (2,558) and a season (232) and intentional walks in a career (688) and a season (120). Bonds would appear to be a lock for the Hall of Fame, but after being tried on four charges of making false statements related to a steroids and HGH investigation (he was convicted of one count of obstruction of justice), his future there is in doubt. We asked some former major leaguers this question: Does Bonds belong in the Hall of Fame?

SAL BANDO

THIRD BASEMAN, 1966-81

I believe Barry Bonds' achievements prior to the steroid controversy while a San Francisco Giant deserve membership into the Hall of Fame. His play while with Pittsburgh should be enough to get into the Hall.

MIKE BIELECKI

PITCHER, 1984-97

Yes, but put him in posthumously along with Pete Rose.

RICO BROGNA

FIRST BASEMAN, 1992, '94-2001

Yes, he belongs in the Hall of Fame. Barry is by far the best player I ever played against or played with in my nine-year MLB playing career. No other player was nearly as talented, intelligent (or had such a) unique ability to focus on a detailed level every game, every season. Barry is arguably one of the top three players to ever play the game. He would be considered that same type of player no matter the era. It does not matter to me at all what he did or did not take or do—that's his business. His ability to concentrate at a higher level than everyone else combined with talent like no other player makes him a definite Hall of Famer in my mind. ... Barry would have been the best player in the game when he was a teenager at Arizona State.

GARY CARTER

HALL OF FAME CATCHER, 1974-92

He was a Hall of Famer before the steroids issue. It's not often you see an athlete get better with age—there has to be a reason. The writers have made a statement on the other players (who are rumored to have used steroids) from the latest Hall of Fame vote, and there's a pretty good indication that anyone that has been accused will not make it. Many of the veteran Hall of Famers have indicated that if any one of (the accused) would be inducted, they have said to take their (own) plaques down. I am just a rookie in the Hall and would support my fellow fraternity members. Maybe one day there might be a special wing for those that used performance-enhancing drugs.

WARREN CROMARTIE

OUTFIELDER/FIRST BASEMAN, 1974, '76-83, '91

Glad (the trial is) over now. (It's) bad for the game. I would only vote for him if he was 185 pounds.

DAN GLADDEN

OUTFIELDER, 1983-93

I think the public opinion is no. All I will say is that there are players, umpires, radio broadcasters and others that are in the Hall of Fame that have done a lot worse than what Barry is accused of. The one thing Barry has done is bring a negative light

to the best game. Looking forward to moving past this era.

PAT HENTGEN

PITCHER, 1991-2004

I think if any player admits to using PEDs or is caught using PEDs, they should not be in the Hall of Fame.

RON KITTLE

OUTFIELDER/DH/FIRST BASEMAN, 1982-91

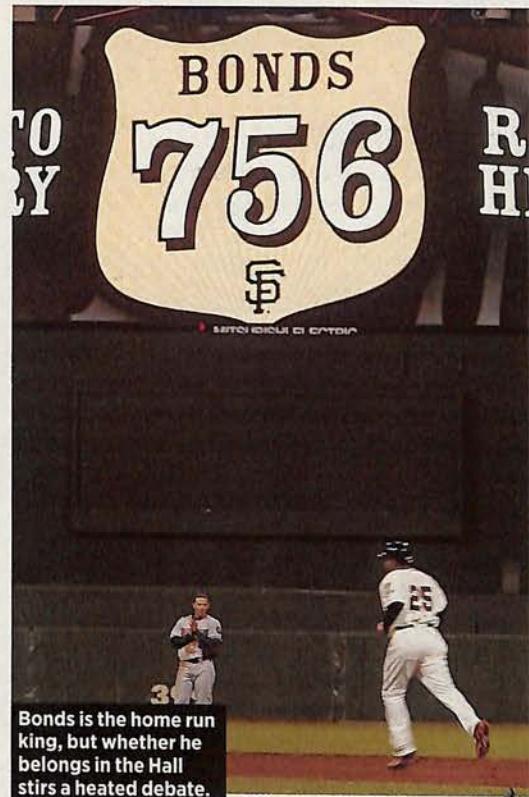
You have got to be (expletive) me!—title of my second book coming soon. No way. He has embarrassed the game.

STEVE LYONS

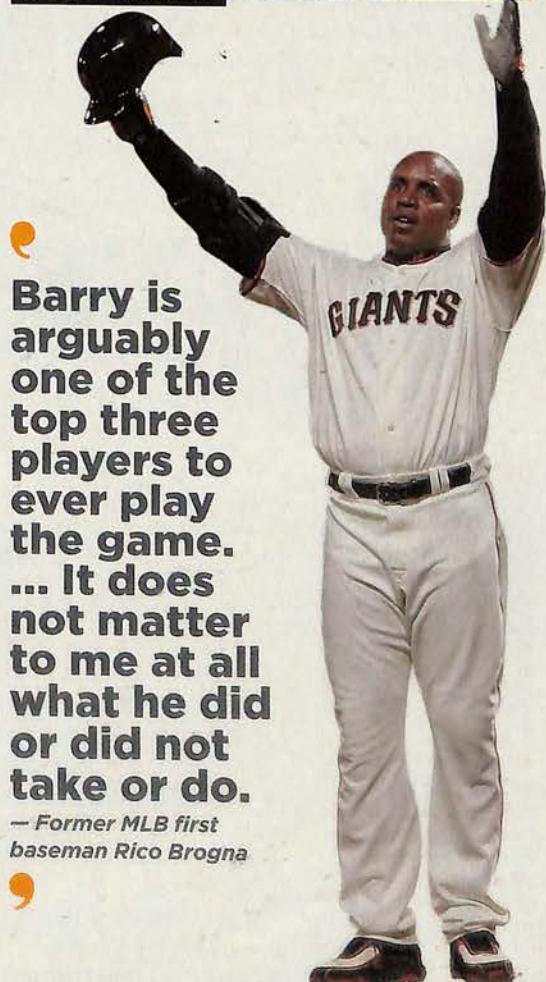
OUTFIELDER/INFILDER, 1985-93

I believe Barry Bonds is a Hall of Famer. Just as I believe in time—10 to 15 years—all of the players from the steroid era will be in the HOF. We just can't ignore the numbers that the players from that time put up or the impact they had on the game. Some players have admitted their use, others have had speculation associated with their name, and still others have been involved without the slightest implication. How can the Hall of Fame voters have the audacity to pick and choose which ones get in based on speculation or their own prejudice? Bonds' current legal issues don't diminish what he did as one of the greatest players of all time.

—Ken Bradley



Bonds is the home run king, but whether he belongs in the Hall stirs a heated debate.



Barry is arguably one of the top three players to ever play the game. ... It does not matter to me at all what he did or did not take or do.

—Former MLB first baseman Rico Brogna

I REMEMBER ...

▶ **AL ATTLES** was in his second year with the Philadelphia Warriors when he jokingly told a reporter that teammate Wilt Chamberlain might one day score 100 points in a game. A few months later, it happened.

It is one of the most unbelievable records in sports, yet little record of it exists. The game, between the Warriors and Knicks, was played on March 2, 1962, in Hershey, Pa. Nobody filmed it. And although Attles jokes that it would seem like an attendance record was set based on people who have told him they were there, "they must've dressed as empty seats, because it wasn't a full house."

The only enduring image from the game is Chamberlain holding a piece of paper on which Warriors publicist Harvey Pollack wrote 100. But the memories in Attles' mind are clear. It's a night he is proud to have been part of, and not because he made all eight of his shots and scored 17 points in the Warriors' 169-147 victory.

AL ATTLES

WARRIORS GUARD WHO PLAYED IN WILT CHAMBERLAIN'S 100-POINT GAME



Attles, who's now an ambassador for the Warriors, remembers how the Knicks tried the hack-a-Wilt strategy, but that only helped Chamberlain get to 100 points.

I kid people about it. I used to kid Wilt about it a lot. I'm part of a duo that scored 117 points. One of them scored 100 points, but still. I also tell people when five guys guard one guy, it's pretty easy to get open.

I remember after the game, Wilt was looking at the stat sheet. He was sweating. He said, "I never thought I'd shoot 63 shots in a game." People thought Wilt was greedy. He wasn't. He tried to come out of the game after it was clear we had it won. The coach, Frank McGuire, wouldn't take him out.

The most important thing about the game is that we won it. Over the years, I don't know how many times, people would say, "You played in the game where he scored 100 points, but you lost the game."

No, we won it.

They were fouling Wilt all-through the game. They kept fouling him thinking he'd miss—he made 28 out of 32 free throws. For a person who wasn't that great a

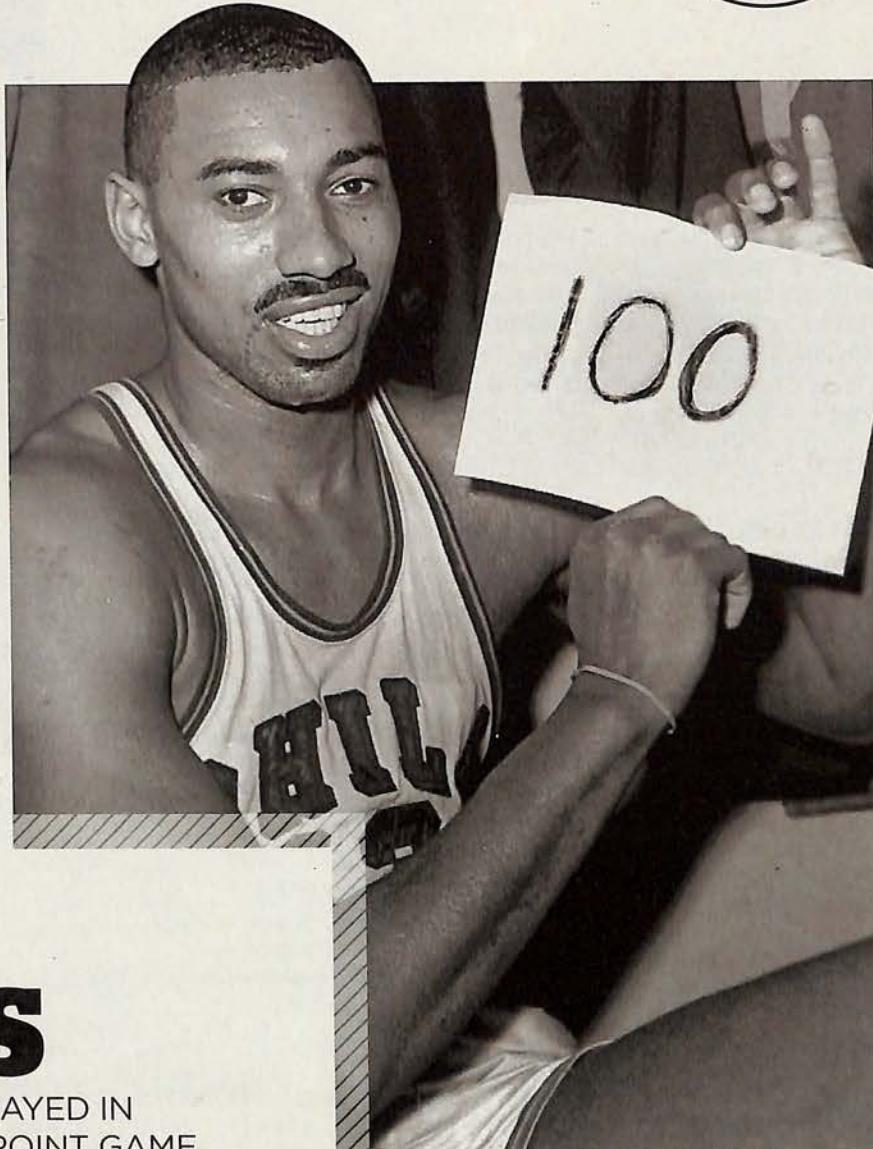
free throw shooter in games, that was good. In practice, we would shoot best out of 10, and he'd win sometimes.

When he kept making them, they started fouling the other Warriors. It looked like a foulfest right at the end of the game.

It was Wilt's night, and it was something that the people who were there were very proud to be part of. Unless they change the rules of the game, I just can't see anybody doing that again. I don't think an opposing coach would allow a player to get to that point before he double-, triple-, quadruple- or even quintuple-teamed him to get the ball out of his hands.

For a long time I thought the game never ended. The fans ran on the court after he scored the 100th point. There was only 46 seconds left, but they did eventually shoo them off.

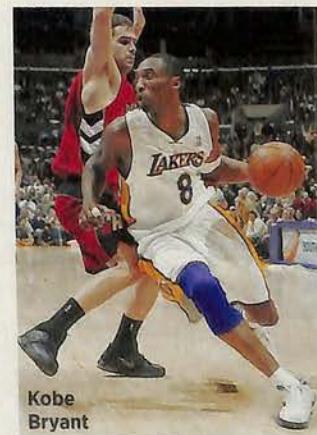
— As told to Matt Crossman



UNTOUCHABLE

If anyone was going to score 100, it was going to be Wilt Chamberlain. Only 22 times in NBA history has a player scored 65 or more points in a game, and Chamberlain is responsible for 15 of those marks. The only other player with multiple appearances on the list: Kobe Bryant.

Player, team	Year	Points
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1962	100
Kobe Bryant, L.A. Lakers	2006	81
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1961	78
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1962	73
Wilt Chamberlain, San Francisco	1962	73
David Thompson, Denver	1978	73
Wilt Chamberlain, San Francisco	1962	72
Elgin Baylor, L.A. Lakers	1960	71
David Robinson, San Antonio	1994	71
Wilt Chamberlain, San Francisco	1963	70
Michael Jordan, Chicago	1990	69
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1967	68
Pete Maravich, New Orleans	1977	68
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1961	67
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1962	67
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1962	67
Wilt Chamberlain, San Francisco	1963	67
Wilt Chamberlain, L.A. Lakers	1969	66
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1962	65
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1962	65
Wilt Chamberlain, Philadelphia	1966	65
Kobe Bryant, L.A. Lakers	2007	65



Kobe Bryant

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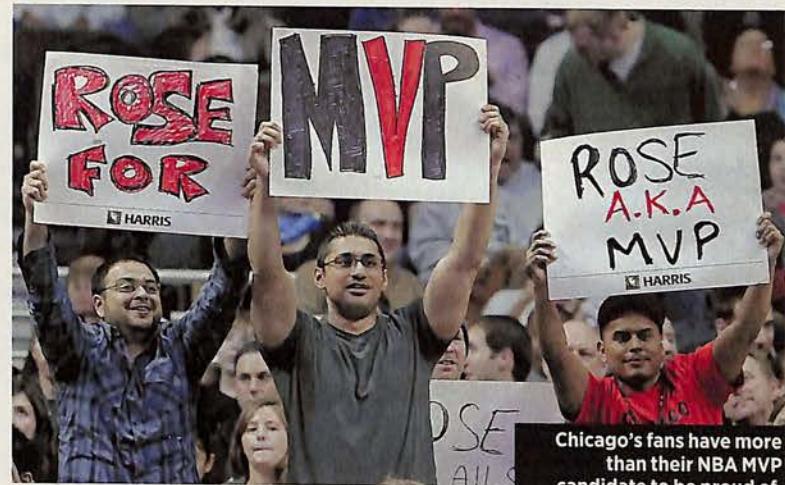
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SPORTS BIZ



Chicago's fans have more than their NBA MVP candidate to be proud of.

STREET & SMITH'S SportsBusiness JOURNAL REPORT

CHICAGO TEAMS PACE ATTENDANCE IN THE NBA AND NHL

NBA ATTENDANCE

The Chicago Bulls led all NBA teams in attendance, averaging 21,792 fans per game—up 5.1 percent from their home mark last year. The Miami Heat had the biggest gain, up 11.6 percent at AmericanAirlines Arena, while the Detroit Pistons had the sharpest drop, down 11.2 percent at the Palace of Auburn Hills. The Heat, with LeBron James, Chris Bosh, Dwyane Wade and Co., were the league's top draw with 19,447 fans per game on the road. NBA teams averaged 17,323 fans per game this season, up from 17,165 last season.

TOP FIVE IN HOME ATTENDANCE

1. Bulls (21,792 average)
2. Trail Blazers (20,510)
3. Cavaliers (20,112)
4. Mavericks (20,102)
5. Heat (19,779)

TOP FIVE ROAD DRAWS

1. Heat (19,447)
2. Lakers (19,088)
3. Celtics (18,965)
4. Bulls (18,431)
5. Knicks (18,044)

NHL ATTENDANCE

The Chicago Blackhawks led all NHL teams in home attendance for the third straight season, with games at United Center packed to 108.7 percent capacity. The Tampa Bay Lightning had the biggest jump, up 11.4 percent at St. Pete Times Forum. NHL teams averaged 17,132 fans per game during the regular season, up from a 17,075 average last season.

TOP FIVE IN HOME ATTENDANCE

1. Blackhawks (21,423 average)
2. Canadiens (21,273)
3. Flyers (19,715)
4. Red Wings (19,680)
5. Maple Leafs (19,354)

TOP FIVE ROAD DRAWS

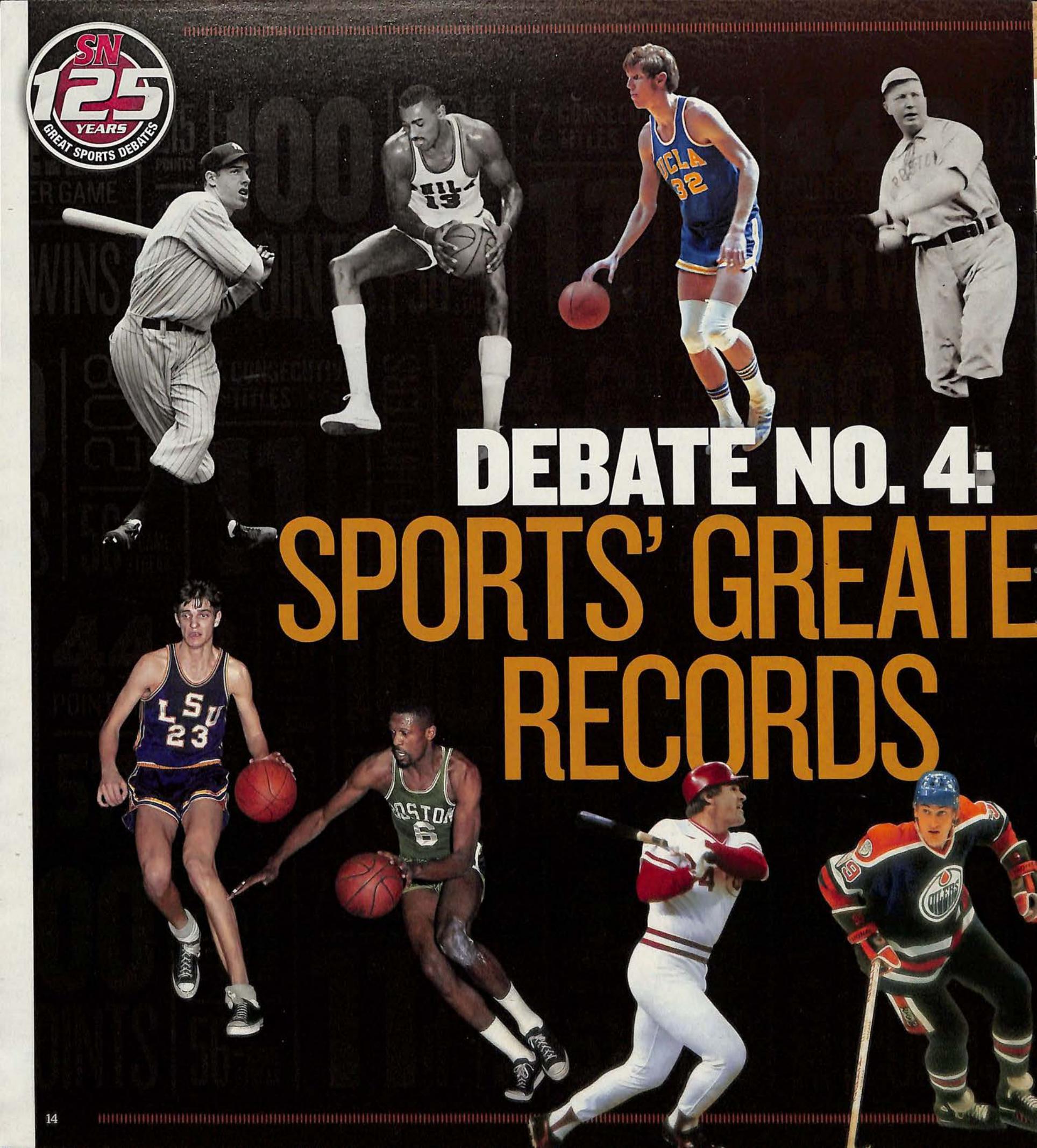
1. Red Wings (18,224)
2. Penguins (17,987)
3. Blackhawks (17,875)
4. Bruins (17,829)
5. Devils (17,789)

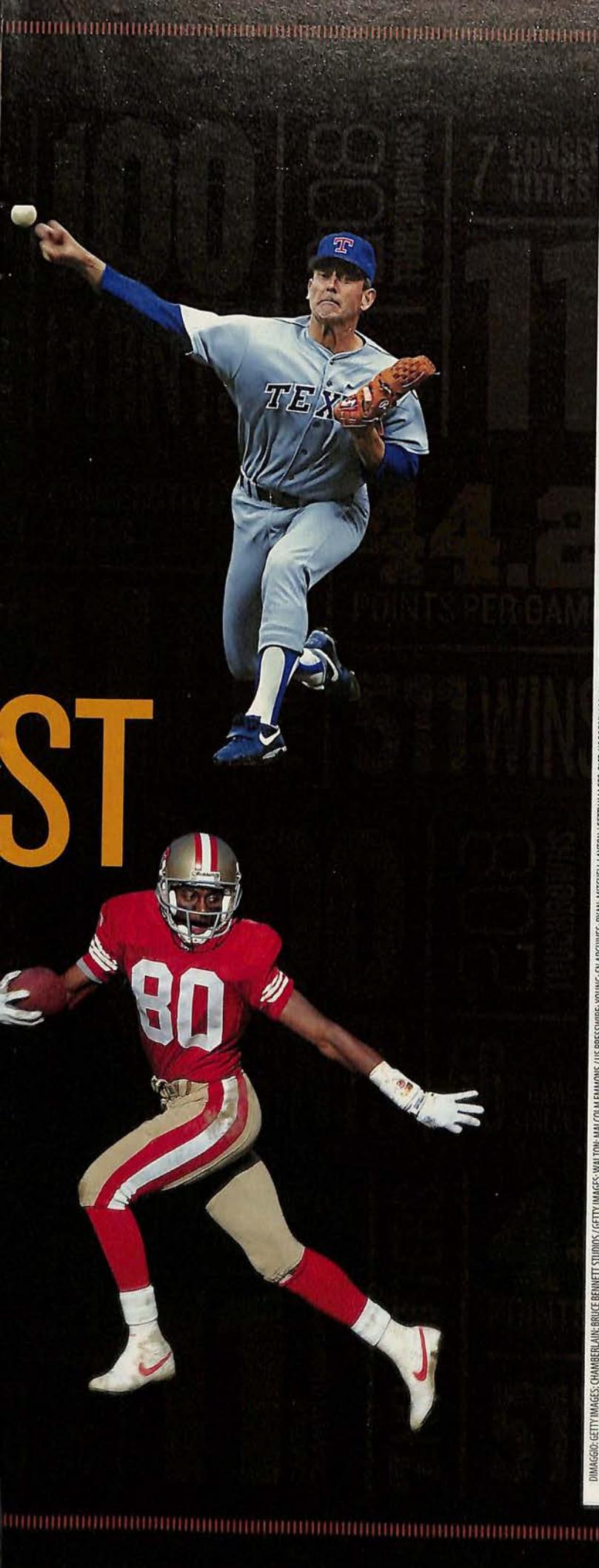
Note: All attendance figures are based on totals posted immediately following games. They might not reflect subsequent adjustments made by the league or team.

UPON FURTHER REVIEW: The Hawks traded Mike Bibby in February. The information was incorrect in the April 11 issue.



DEBATE NO. 4: SPORTS' GREATEST RECORDS





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There's one way to live forever

SOME OF SPORTS' NUMBERS ARE SO SPECIAL, SO ICONIC, THAT EVEN LONG AFTER THE PLAYERS WHO ACHIEVED THEM ARE GONE, THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS WILL LIVE ON

By Steve Greenberg

In May of 1991, Rickey Henderson stole third base at the Oakland Coliseum, ripped the bag from its moorings and thrust it aloft and then informed 36,000 cheering fans—and the world, lest any man, woman or child not know—that he was “the greatest of all time.” And you know what? He very much was. It was Henderson’s 939th steal on the way to a mind-blowing career total of 1,406, a seemingly unbreakable record that holds up well among the greatest, and most iconic, marks in all of sports.

Only Henderson’s 1,406—unlike, say, Pete Rose’s 4,256—didn’t crack our list of the top 10 records. Why? For no concrete reason other than it didn’t receive enough votes from *Sporting News*’ editors and writers. You are free to disagree with us, as these matters are anything but cut-and-dried. As you might disagree with the Hit King when he says, “The best baseball record, bar none, is Cy Young’s 511 wins.” (We do—511 is on our list, but there’s one baseball record above it.)

The fourth in our series of Great Sports Debates, commemorating our 125th year of publication (that’s got to be some kind of record), differs from the first three in that there was so much more prime material from which to choose. The greatest teams from the NFL, NHL and college basketball... well, for every season truly deserving of the term *great*, there seem to be dozens of records that do what Henderson did: blow the mind.

They take aback even those responsible for them. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar—part

of our list along with the UCLA teams that won seven consecutive NCAA titles from 1967-73—still is amazed by all that wizardry in Westwood.

“After my sophomore year, which was the first championship in that streak, I don’t think I could’ve imagined what was in store,” he says. “I guess we figured we might have a run at it. But how do you see so much success coming?”

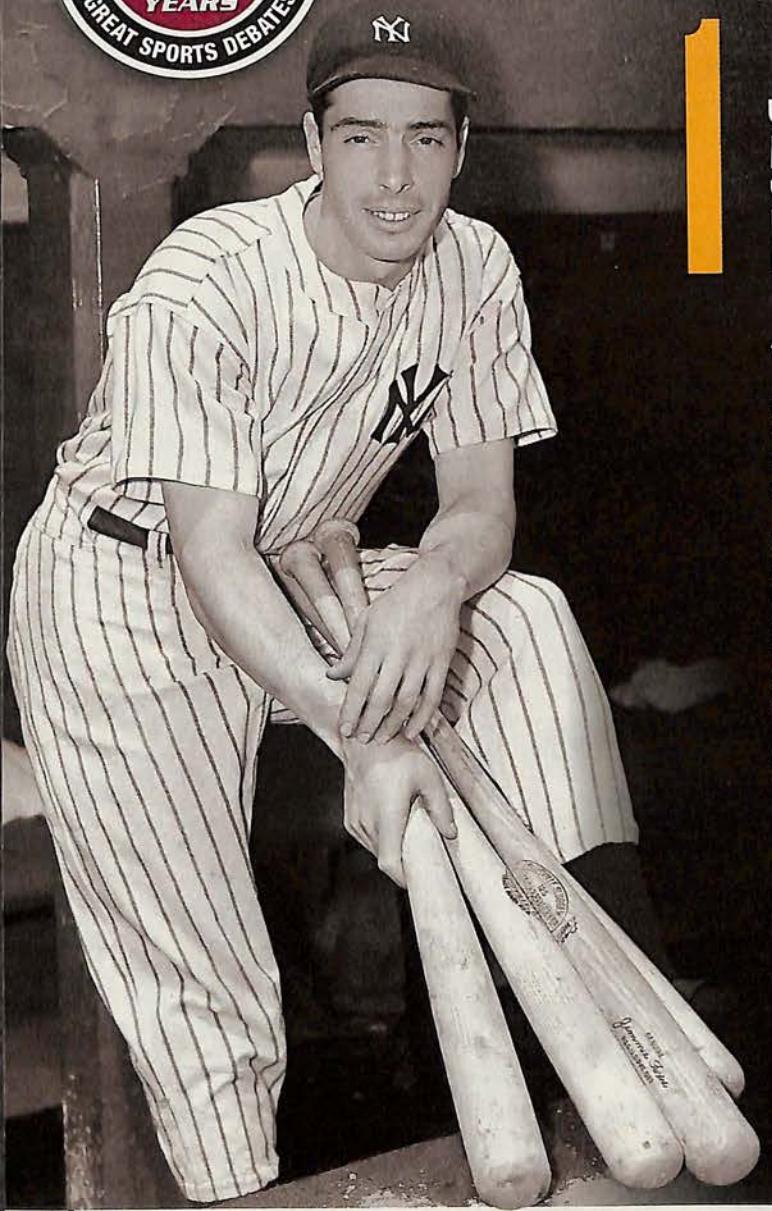
And how do you judge the most remarkable individual and team successes, across all sports, against one another? Sometimes it’s the little things that leave the most lasting impressions. Rose—like many who were watching—didn’t fully realize the significance of passing Ty Cobb as baseball’s all-time hits leader until about eight minutes after No. 4,192 had settled into left-center field. “I don’t know if anyone else could ever say they equaled that standing ovation,” he says. “If they’d stood for seven minutes, they wouldn’t have broken me down. It took eight minutes to break me down.” A sudden cascade of tears from the toughest SOB in the game—an indelible memory for all.

Certain records are every bit as permanent as, oh, a Hall of Fame enshrinement. Rose’s e-mail address includes the phrase *bitking*. “I don’t want to change that e-mail,” he says, “and I don’t think I’ll have to. I think it’s pretty safe to say I’m going to die the Hit King.”

The greatest records live forever, do they not?



SPORTS' GREATEST RECORDS



1 JOE DIMAGGIO'S 56-GAME HITTING STREAK

The 1941 baseball season produced two feats that haven't been repeated since.

Ted Williams hit .406 for the Red Sox, but he was one-upped—in terms of public admiration and the MVP vote—by Joe DiMaggio, who compiled a 56-game hitting streak for the Yankees.

DiMaggio's almost unfathomable stretch started May 15 and finally ended on July 17 in Cleveland, when Indians third baseman Ken Keltner robbed the Yankee Clipper of a couple of base hits with his nifty glove work. DiMaggio hit .408 during the streak, which included 34 games with one hit, 13 with two hits, five with three hits and four with four hits.

Nobody has reached the .400 mark since Williams, but nobody has come anywhere near DiMaggio's 56-game streak. In 1978, Pete Rose got to 44 games, but that's still 12 insanely pressure-packed games short of DiMaggio's number. Paul Molitor fashioned a 39-game streak in 1987, and Jimmy Rollins reached 38 games between the end of 2005 and start of 2006. Just four years after DiMaggio, Tommy Holmes had a 37-game streak.

Every other elite hitter since has fallen so short of DiMaggio that it's not even worth a mention. "I can't even think about 56 games," says Giants shortstop Miguel Tejada, whose personal best is 24 games. "That's day after day and a lot of pressure every time you go up."

Especially where Joe D. did it, in New York.

PEER PERSPECTIVE

Robin Ventura, who had a 58-game hitting streak in college, says: "It's really impressive. What people don't realize is (DiMaggio) also had a 61-game hitting streak in the minors. It wasn't a flash in the pan. He did it a couple of times. Even with mine, I felt it was extremely hard—to be able to do it every day just weighs on you. To do it at the best level of pitching there is in the world—it's shocking it would last that long. You have to have some luck on your side to do what he did. It's something I really don't think will ever be broken with the depth of pitching there is now. Anyone who gets to 30 is crazy, let alone 56."

FOR THE RECORD

DiMaggio's record hitting streak began in a 13-1 loss to the White Sox that left the Yankees 14-15 and in fourth place, 6½ games back, in the American League standings. But New York won 41 times during the Yankee Clipper's run to lead the standings by six games on its way to the A.L. pennant and World Series title.

June 8: Hits three home runs and drives in seven in a doubleheader sweep.

June 17: Seventh-inning grounder bounces off White Sox

shortstop Luke Appling's shoulder and is ruled a hit.

June 26: With no hits and the streak in jeopardy, doubles on the first pitch with two outs in the bottom of the eighth.

June 29: Tops George Sisler's 41-game streak (1922) with a single in his last at-bat of a doubleheader against Washington.

July 5: Gets one hit, his 19th homer of the season, to top Willie Keeler's 45-game streak.

July 17: Grounds into a bases-loaded double play in the eighth to go hitless in three at-bats.

July 18: Begins a 16-game hitting streak with a pair of hits.

A GAME-BY-GAME LOOK AT THE STREAK

Game	Date	Opponent	AB	H	HR	RBI	BB
1	May 15	Chicago	4	1	0	1	0
2	May 16	Chicago	4	2	1	1	0
3	May 17	Chicago	3	1	0	0	1
4	May 18	St. Louis	3	3	0	1	1
5	May 19	St. Louis	3	1	0	0	1
6	May 20	St. Louis	5	1	0	1	0
7	May 21	Detroit	5	2	0	1	0
8	May 22	Detroit	4	1	0	1	0
9	May 23	Boston	5	1	0	2	0
10	May 24	Boston	4	1	0	2	0
11	May 25	Boston	4	1	0	0	0
12	May 27	Washington	5	4	1	3	0
13	May 28	Washington	4	1	0	0	1
14	May 29	Washington	3	1	0	0	0
15	May 30 (1)	Boston	2	1	0	0	2
16	May 30 (2)	Boston	3	1	0	0	0
17	June 1 (1)	Cleveland	4	1	0	0	0
18	June 1 (2)	Cleveland	4	1	0	0	0
19	June 2	Cleveland	4	2	0	0	0
20	June 3	Detroit	4	1	1	1	0
21	June 5	Detroit	5	1	0	1	0
22	June 7	St. Louis	5	3	0	1	0
23	June 8 (1)	St. Louis	4	2	2	4	1
24	June 8 (2)	St. Louis	4	2	1	3	0
25	June 10	Chicago	5	1	0	0	0
26	June 12	Chicago	4	2	1	1	1
27	June 14	Cleveland	2	1	0	1	2
28	June 15	Cleveland	3	1	1	1	1
29	June 16	Cleveland	5	1	0	0	0
30	June 17	Chicago	4	1	0	0	0
31	June 18	Chicago	3	1	0	0	1
32	June 19	Chicago	3	3	1	2	1
33	June 20	Detroit	5	4	0	1	0
34	June 21	Detroit	4	1	0	1	0
35	June 22	Detroit	5	2	1	2	0
36	June 24	St. Louis	4	1	0	0	0
37	June 25	St. Louis	4	1	1	3	0
38	June 26	St. Louis	4	1	0	1	0
39	June 27	Philadelphia	3	2	1	2	2
40	June 28	Philadelphia	5	2	0	0	0
41	June 29 (1)	Washington	4	1	0	0	0
42	June 29 (2)	Washington	5	1	0	1	0
43	July 1 (1)	Boston	4	2	0	1	1
44	July 1 (2)	Boston	3	1	0	1	0
45	July 2	Boston	5	1	1	3	0
46	July 5	Philadelphia	4	1	1	2	1
47	July 6 (1)	Philadelphia	5	4	0	2	0
48	July 6 (2)	Philadelphia	4	2	0	2	0
49	July 10	St. Louis	2	1	0	0	0
50	July 11	St. Louis	5	4	1	2	0
51	July 12	St. Louis	5	2	0	1	0
52	July 13 (1)	Chicago	4	3	0	0	0
53	July 13 (2)	Chicago	4	1	0	0	1
54	July 14	Chicago	3	1	0	0	1
55	July 15	Chicago	4	2	0	2	1
56	July 16	Cleveland	4	3	0	0	1
Totals			223	91	15	55	21

Longest hitting streaks

Rank	Player	Team	Games	Year(s)
1.	Joe DiMaggio	New York (A.L.)	56	1941
2.	Willie Keeler	Baltimore (N.L.)	45	1896-97
3.	Pete Rose	Cincinnati (N.L.)	44	1978
4.	Bill Dahlen	Chicago (N.L.)	42	1894
5.	George Sisler	St. Louis (A.L.)	41	1922
6.	Ty Cobb	Detroit (A.L.)	40	1911
7.	Paul Molitor	Milwaukee (A.L.)	39	1987
8.	Jimmy Rollins	Philadelphia (N.L.)	38	2005-06
9.	Tommy Holmes	Boston (N.L.)	37	1945
10.	Gene DeMontreville	Washington (N.L.)	36	1896-97

— Matt Crossman, Ryan Fagan, Anthony Witradio

2

WILT CHAMBERLAIN'S 100 POINTS

There have always been big men of whom it might've been said, "He couldn't get 20 and 10 if he were alone in the gym." Not only wasn't Wilt Chamberlain alone on the night in Hershey, Pa., when he scored 100 points (and grabbed 25 rebounds) in an NBA game, but he was surrounded—harassed, even, albeit pathetically—by an assortment of New York Knicks.

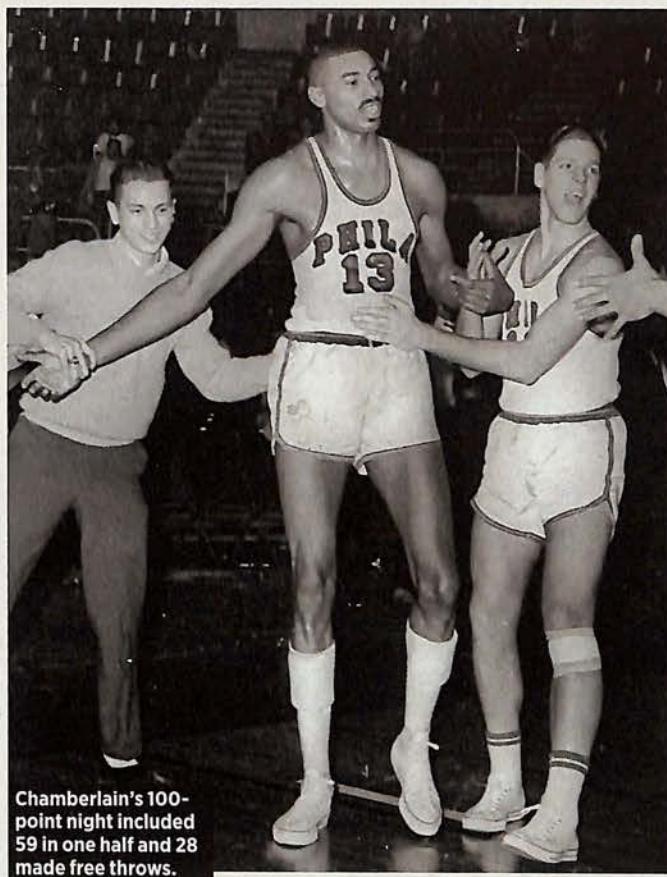
If his opponents had been complicit in a two-bit marketing scheme to get the Philadelphia Warriors superstar such a gaudy record, that would be another matter entirely. But Chamberlain shot 32 free throws—making 28, for him an uncommon display of marksmanship—indicative not of a transparent fix but of a gaggle of frustrated Knicks. Oh, there were shenanigans: After Wilt hit 80, then 90, the Warriors fouled in order to increase their own possessions. But the Knicks were fouling, too—Warriors other than Chamberlain, who'd been in the 70s before, but 100? Not if they could stop it. Which, of course, they couldn't.



PEER PERSPECTIVE

Hall of Famer Rick Barry, who had 64 points in a 1974 game, says: "That's certainly one you can put down that will never be broken. There's no way in the world that anybody will score 100 points in an NBA game again. First, I don't know if anybody is really capable of it.

Second, I don't think any coach would allow it. You'd put four guys on him. Kobe got 81, and that was amazing. But he still had to get 19 more. That's a lot of points. Not many people get 19 points in one half very often. ... I would have had to score 36 more points; most players never get 36 points in one game in their whole career."



Chamberlain's 100-point night included 59 in one half and 28 made free throws.

FOR THE RECORD

The NBA lists 72 records held by Chamberlain. (Yes, that's all.) Four of them he shares, so we won't bother with those here. Tell you what: Let's just go with a half-dozen that'll knock your striped tube socks right off.

37.6 Points per game in 1959-60, his rookie season—now that's how you make an entrance.

55 Rebounds in one game—against Bill Russell's Celtics in 1960.

48.5 Minutes per game in 1961-62, when he also happened to average ...

50.4 points (But who's counting?)

59 Points scored in a half. What, you think 100 happens by accident?

22.9 Rebounds per game, career. Yes, career.

0 Disqualifications, in 1,045 games. OK, so there are many others who never fouled out, but come on.

— Matt Crossman, Steve Greenberg

3

THE UCLA BRUINS' SEVEN CONSECUTIVE NATIONAL TITLES

A couple of years before he died, in an interview with *Sporting News* magazine, the great John Wooden offered this advice to young head coaches: "One of the most important things of all is patience. Good things take time." It would've been perfect advice for all the college basketball programs that existed in UCLA's colossal shadow from 1964-75, when the Bruins won a staggering 10 national championships.

Within that run is a record that will never be touched, perhaps never approached: seven consecutive titles, from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's first NCAA Tournament in '67 to Bill Walton's next-to-last in '73. No school has won more than two in a row since then.

Did the Bruins tend to have the best players? Certainly. Were there fewer teams—fewer rounds to win—in the tournaments they captured? Yes, that, too. But something tells us Wooden's UCLA world-beaters wouldn't have suffered very many scares in the Round of 64—or 68.



The 1973 title was the last in the run of seven straight.

FOR THE RECORD

You've got a pretty good handle on Abdul-Jabbar's relevance. You probably don't need us to tell you about Walton, either. But how many other UCLA players from the program's seven-year championship streak do you suppose went on to play in the NBA and/or ABA? The answer is 13. The Bruins were locked and loaded—and because we're talking seven seasons, here are the seven best of the rest in terms of their pro careers:

1. Sidney Wicks (titles at UCLA: 1969, '70, '71).

Was an All-Star in his first four seasons in the NBA with Portland, averaging 23.1 points and 10.6 rebounds.

2. Jamaal Wilkes ('72, '73).

Won three titles (one with the Warriors, two with the Lakers) and made three All-Star teams.



PEER PERSPECTIVE

Florida coach Billy Donovan, one of only two men, along with Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, to coach his team to consecutive NCAA championships since Wooden led UCLA to its last of seven in a row in 1973, says: "I think it's incredible for a couple reasons. One, it wasn't

during a time when a lot of guys left and went pro. So you had players all over the country, not just at UCLA. I think the thing that stands out to me most

about the record is knowing that every time they stepped on the floor, they were getting everybody's best shot. And everybody's coming in as the underdog, and UCLA is always the favorite. The mindset of their team to be able to do that, 88 games in a row, seven national titles—it's incredible, the focus those kids had. They obviously had great players, talent, but to be able to not have those letdowns. ... I think the human element of having a bad day—we didn't shoot it well, just didn't have it—it's an incredible accomplishment for Coach Wooden to get his team in that frame of mind."

3. Swen Nater ('72, '73). A skinny 6-11 center who never started a game at UCLA but was a two-time ABA All-Star with the Spurs.

4. Lucius Allen ('67, '68). Amassed 9,407 points and 3,174 assists in 10 productive NBA seasons.

5. Curtis Rowe ('69, '70, '71). Averaged 11.6 points and 7.2 rebounds in eight NBA seasons.

6. Henry Bibby ('70, '71, '72). Was a bench player as a rookie with the championship Knicks in '73; lasted eight more NBA seasons.

7. Dave Meyers ('73). Played four solid seasons with the Bucks—after being part of the Lakers' trade for Abdul-Jabbar.

— Mike DeCourcy, Steve Greenberg



SPORTS' GREATEST RECORDS



Cy Young

4

CY YOUNG'S 511 WINS

Greg Maddux and Roger Clemens never had a chance, and both rank in the top 10 in career wins. Tim Wakefield and Roy Halladay, the active pitchers with the most career

victories, won't even sniff the 300-win plateau.

That's how impressive Cy Young's total of 511 career wins is. No one will approach his mark, not with today's pitch counts and inning limits and organizations handing their best pitchers with kid gloves from the time they are drafted.

Young's record is a testament to health, ability and plenty of luck.

After all, wins aren't even in a pitcher's control. A pitcher can dominate. He can blow away hitters with baffling pitches and walk off the mound untouched. And he can still lose.

"Pretty impossible," Giants ace and two-time N.L. Cy Young award winner Tim Lincecum says.



PEER PERSPECTIVE

Cardinals RHP Chris Carpenter, the 2005 N.L. Cy Young award winner who has 133 career wins, says:

"Obviously, that's a ton of wins. (Even 300 wins) is such a tough thing to accomplish, and not many people have done it. I know in the past there were guys, but recently not

so much. I don't even think there's anybody close, an active player, that is even close (to 300). To get 300 wins, it shows durability. It shows how good you are. The only way you do that is take the ball and pitch for a long time and keep winning, obviously. It's unbelievable how impressive it is. This is my 15th year and I don't even have 150, and I feel like I've done pretty well. There are a lot of pitchers like that.

"Again, it's being hurt, the injuries. You have to stay in the game to do that. You have to be healthy and be able to pitch deep into games so you have more of a hand in the outcome. And wins are not in your control, really. You can go out and throw a shutout and still not win. So even if you're good or great, you still might not get that win, so it makes it so much tougher.

"I don't know how you compare that to an offensive record, but I just don't see it happening anymore. I think you have to take (the 300-win milestone) down a little bit to make it more reachable because the way the game is now, guys just aren't going to get there anymore. So to think about (511 wins) is crazy. Guys don't even get 300 anymore. It's safe."

— Anthony Witrado

An untouchable era: Pre-modern day records that will stand the test of time

Not all records were made to be broken. Because of all the changes since baseball's inception in 1876, numerous career records—many of them set by the same 6-2 righthander who is the namesake of pitching's most prestigious award—will never be touched.

Never say never? In these cases, we can:

Cy Young's 511 career wins. A mere 25 seasons of 20 wins would bring a pitcher within 11 of Young's mark. In a 22-season career that began when he was 23, Young won 20-plus "only" 15 times. In five of those seasons, however, he topped 30 wins. "I'm not taking anything away from Cal Ripken's streak (2,632 consecutive games played). That would be almost impossible to break," says Cardinals righthander Adam Wainwright, the N.L.'s winningest pitcher from 2009-10. "But Cy Young's record is impossible. There's no way to break it."

Young's 749 complete games. Since 2000, CC Sabathia is the only pitcher to complete at least 10 games in one season. The Yankees lefthander has 30 complete games in his career; he could complete 35 starts for the next 20 seasons and still be 19 short.

Walter Johnson's 110 shutouts.

Phillies righthander Roy Halladay's total of 19 shutouts is the most among active pitchers. Only four pitchers have reached double digits. In fact, only 21 active pitchers have won 110 games.

Ed Walsh's 1.82 career ERA.

Twenty-nine pitchers have a career ERA of 2.50 or lower. None pitched after 1927. The lowest in the 84 years since: Hoyt Wilhelm (2.52 from 1952-72).

Joe Sewell's career rate of one strikeout every 73.05 plate appearances. In his Hall of Fame career (1920-33), Sewell struck out 114 times. Total. Sixty players struck out that many times in 2010.

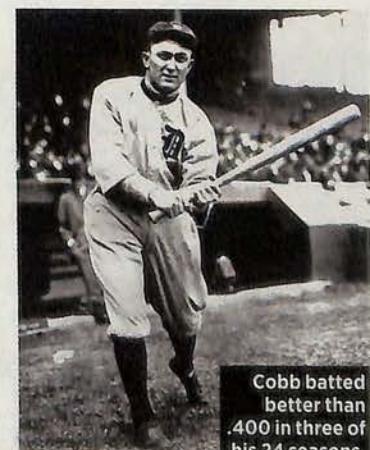
Ty Cobb's .367 career batting average. Cardinals first baseman Albert Pujols, the active leader at .331, would have to go 328-for-328 to tie Cobb. Over the past 70 years, only Ted Williams (.344) and Tony Gwynn (.338) have retired with better than a .335 career average.

Because it is impossible to compare two dramatically different eras, Cardinals right fielder Lance Berkman, a five-time All-Star, suggests Major League Baseball use two record

books: one for before Jackie Robinson and one for after Jackie Robinson.

"The problem to me with baseball is a lot of the quote-unquote records like the 56-game hitting streak are just not possible now because the competition is so much better," Berkman says. "There were no African Americans, there were no Latin players. It was a very small talent pool. Those are great records and feats that were amazing in their era. But it's hard to compare them to today."

— Stan McNeal



Cobb batted better than .400 in three of his 24 seasons.



Ryan's final no-hitter came in 1991, when, at 44, he struck out 16 Blue Jays.

5

NOLAN RYAN'S SEVEN NO-HITTERS

Nolan Ryan was 26 when he threw his first no-hitter, a 12-strikeout gem for the Angels on May 15, 1973, in Kansas City.

He was still 26 when he threw his second one, exactly two months later in Detroit. Showing typical Ryan dominance, he fanned 17 Tigers. He threw another one in his final start of 1974, walking eight Twins along the way but striking out 15, and then notched his fourth in 1975, fanning nine Orioles.

No one outside the great Sandy Koufax had ever thrown four no-hitters in a career. Ryan did it over three seasons.

Then, for good measure, he added three more during his 27-year career—including one in 1991 when he struck out 16 Blue Jays at the ripe age of 44. His lifetime average 6.6 hits allowed per nine innings is, no shock here, the best mark in baseball history.



PEER PERSPECTIVE

MLB Network analyst Al Leiter, who threw the first no-hitter in Marlins history, says: "I've pitched games where I didn't think I was going to get out of the first inning, and I did great. Then there were games where I was in the bullpen thinking, Wow, and I didn't get out of the fifth. ... There are a few guys who every time they toe the rubber, you think they could throw a no-hitter, and Ryan is one of them, with his tremendous fastball and knee-buckling curve."

FOR THE RECORD

Anything can happen when the baseball is hit into the field of play. The ball can take a crazy hop. A defender can make an error.

Striking out the batter provides a much higher degree of certainty, and nobody was better at making that happen than Ryan, who racked up 5,714 strikeouts—including the single-season record of 383 in 1973—in his amazing career.

Second place all time is lefty Randy Johnson, who finished 839 strikeouts behind the legendary righthanded fireballer.

— Matt Crossman, Ryan Fagan

6

JERRY RICE'S 208 TOUCHDOWNS

The fact Jerry Rice has the record by 33 touchdowns (over Emmitt Smith) is a testament to his work ethic, which allowed him to have a long, healthy and productive career. In the process, he helped three of his quarterbacks—Joe Montana, Steve Young and Rich Gannon—win NFL MVP awards.

In his signature third season, 1987, it took Rice only 12 games to score 23 times. It was the second of 10 consecutive years with double-digit TDs.

Rice also scored when it counted. He holds the record for most playoff touchdowns (22) and most Super Bowl touchdowns (eight). That includes his single-game mark for receiving touchdowns (three), which he set in Super Bowl XXIV and matched in Super Bowl XXIX.

The record is even more impressive because Rice wasn't a running back, meaning there were no easy 1-yard plunges into the end zone. He had to run routes, get open and make catches for his scores.

But most of all, the mark looks close to unbreakable. A lifetime from now, there's a good chance he will remain the only member of the 200-touchdown club.



PEER PERSPECTIVE
Hall of Fame WR Steve Largent, who has 101 career TDs, says:

"Touchdowns are the most significant record. They enable your team to win, and that's what makes Jerry's record important. Jerry flew by fairly modern-day TD-record holders like me. Jerry is the gold standard of NFL receivers. I don't say this lightly or flippantly—I think Jerry Rice is the best player to ever play the game at any position. He was a winner, he is and will be for a long time if not permanently the standard-bearer for all receivers that have ever played in the league."

FOR THE RECORD

Among wide receivers, Rice is Everest and everyone else looks like foothills. At his position, those behind him on the all-time TDs list are former 49ers teammate Terrell Owens (156) and fellow ex-Raider Randy Moss (154), but at 37 and 34, respectively, and with both looking like they might not have an NFL team in 2011, it might be a long time before someone challenges Rice's receiving marks.

	Rice	Next-closest WR
Receiving TDs	197	153 (Owens and Moss)
Receiving yards	22,895	15,934 (Owens)
Receptions	1,549	1,102 (Marvin Harrison)

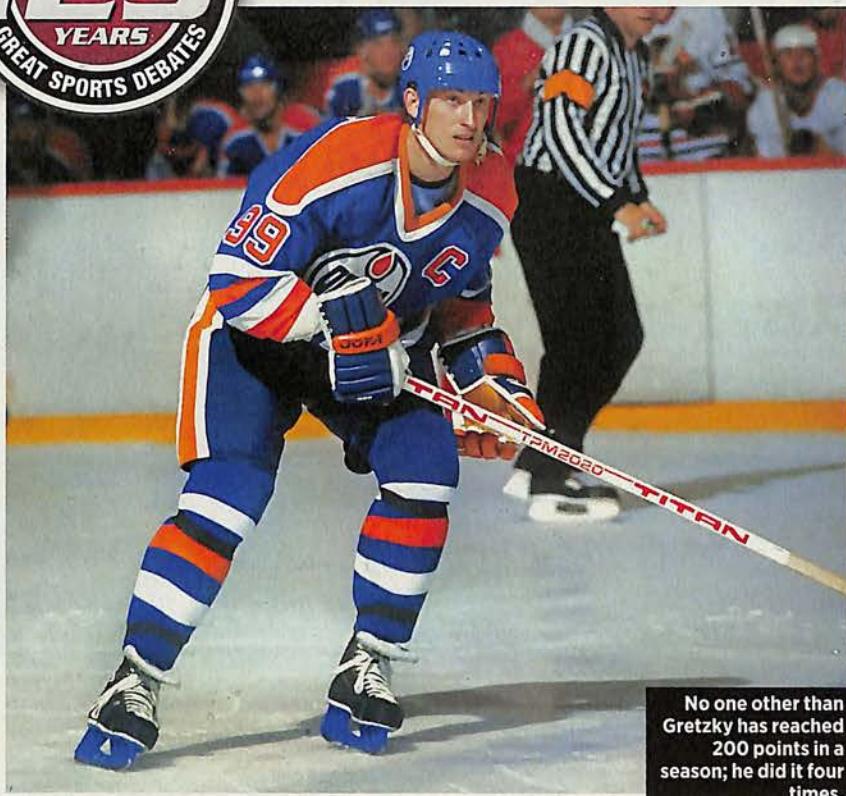
— Vinnie Iyer



Jerry Rice



SPORTS' GREATEST RECORDS



No one other than Gretzky has reached 200 points in a season; he did it four times.

7 WAYNE GRETZKY'S 215-POINT SEASON

When Sidney Crosby got off to an incredible start this season, his numbers were astounding. Through 41 games, he had 32 goals. He had 66 points. Despite not having played a game since early January, he was one of the top 15 goal scorers in the NHL when the season ended.

But even if he had kept up that remarkable pace, he wouldn't have come close to the legend. He wouldn't have even approached Wayne Gretzky.

Gretzky's single-season record of 215 points, set in the 1985-86 season, is hockey's untouchable record. Last season, nobody came within 100 points of Gretzky, not even Hart Trophy winner Henrik Sedin. The Great One's record lives on, and barring any dramatic rule changes—like eliminating goalies—it always will.



PEER PERSPECTIVE

Hall of Famer Luc Robitaille, Gretzky's former teammate, says:

"It's crazy for someone to even get 200 points. I don't see anyone ever getting near it. Wayne Gretzky was quicker than everyone else when he played. He was quicker with his mind, he was quicker with his feet, he was quicker with his hands. He came and he literally changed the game. He was the first guy to actually sit behind the net and be patient there where he could see the game from a different angle. For me what was amazing, it was a span of three years, he got over 600 points. When you think about that and put it in perspective, it was absolutely incredible. I remember he came to L.A. and had (168) points and it was considered an off year. Scoring 215 points is like someone coming in next year and hitting 95 home runs in baseball. That's really what it is—that's the only way I can compare it."

FOR THE RECORD

If you watch film of Gretzky in his prime, it's like he's playing at a different speed from everyone else. And his numbers reflected it. The 215-point season isn't the only Gretzky record that is virtually unreachable—the NHL record book is full of them. When he retired in 1999, he had rewritten it, including:

Most career points: 2,856

Most career goals: 894

Most career assists: 1,962

Most consecutive 40-goal seasons: 12

Most consecutive 100-point seasons: 13

Most goals in one season: 92

Longest consecutive point streak: 51 games

—Craig Custance

8

PETE ROSE'S 4,256 HITS

It should be a matter of mere months before Derek Jeter, 36, joins the 3,000-hit club, and when he does it he'll be the only active player in baseball on a 28-man list that includes 24 Hall of Famers. Oh, and he'll be just 1,256 hits—six or seven full Hall-quality seasons—from Pete Rose's perhaps unreachable career total. For sure, Jeter will never threaten Charlie Hustle's mark.

None of the game's most accomplished hitters has a fathomable chance to catch Rose. Alex Rodriguez, 35, trails by more than 1,500 hits. By season's end, the great Albert Pujols will still be 31—and less than halfway to 4,256.

"My record is kind of protected," the 70-year-old Rose says, "because of the way guys play ball today. Guys take a lot of games off, are concentrating on home runs. You're going to have a lot more guys that hit 30, 40 home runs than get 200 hits this year."

Barring special circumstances, 3,000 hits is an automatic gateway to Hall induction. Maybe you've heard by now that Rose's career is one of those special circumstances. (So is No. 24 Rafael Palmeiro's, whereas No. 20 Craig Biggio will get his Hall call in due time.) But just imagine 4,000 hits, let alone 4,256.

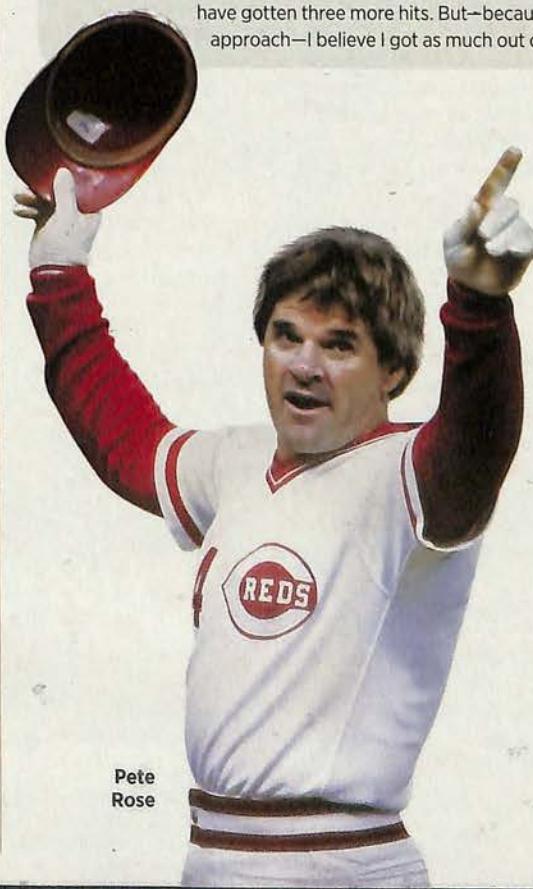
Says Rose, "In a lot of ways, the hits record is the Hall of Fame for me."



PEER PERSPECTIVE

Hall of Famer Hank Aaron, No. 3 on the all-time hits list, says:

"I was watching Derek Jeter in a recent game, and the announcer was trying to sum up the changes Jeter has made in his batting style. What the announcer didn't say was: Jeter is getting old. Late in a career, you have to change your approach—I know I did. There came a point when I couldn't keep holding my bat in what I called a 'lazy man' position because I just couldn't get to the ball quickly enough that way anymore. I remember watching a very good friend of mine struggle with that. I hit behind Eddie Mathews and loved to watch the way he'd wiggle the bat around, then snap it forward at the last moment—things no hitting instructor would recommend. Eddie was so quick that he could get to the ball anyway, but then he got older. Eddie wouldn't change his style, and I watched with sadness while his average and home run production dropped. I'd have loved to have gotten 500 more hits like Pete Rose. Shoot, I'd have loved to have gotten three more hits. But—because I was willing to change my approach—I believe I got as much out of this body as I could have."



Pete Rose

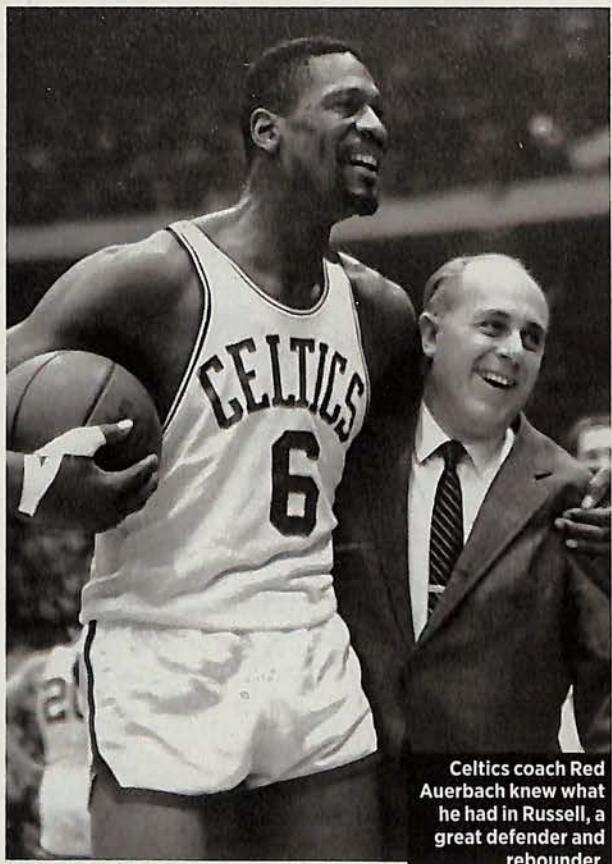
FOR THE RECORD

"I gave hope to a lot of little guys," Rose says. What does he mean by that? "We're not the home run hitters. We play every day, get a lot of hits and win a lot of games."

Rose, who played 24 seasons, isn't just the Hit King; he's also the at-bats king, the outs king and many things in between. What means almost as much to him as his signature record for hits is the 1,972 winning games in which he played—as safe as the hits mark, and maybe more so.

"That's why you play, man," Rose says. "Just imagine a guy breaks in and plays 19 years, and every year wins 100 games. You're still going to be 72 short."

—Steve Greenberg



Celtics coach Red Auerbach knew what he had in Russell, a great defender and rebounder.

10

PETE MARAVICH'S 44.2 CAREER POINTS PER GAME

When "Pistol" Pete Maravich enrolled at LSU in 1966, freshmen couldn't play varsity basketball.

What would the NCAA record book have looked like without that limitation? In his three years, Maravich scored 3,667 points; nobody has come within 400 points of that mark—even in a four-year career. Maravich averaged 44.2 points per game for his career. Notre Dame's Austin Carr is second at 34.6 points per game.

Carr's average looks like a video game number. Maravich's looks

downright fictional.

Dale Brown, who took over as the LSU head coach a couple of years after Maravich left and eventually became good friends with him, lends this perspective to Pistol's scoring proficiency. "All you'd have to do to beat his average is go out there and knock down 15 3-pointers every single game, and you'd beat his scoring mark by eight-tenths of a point," Brown says. "That's all."

The record for made 3-pointers in a single Division I game, by the way, is 15. It has happened once. Ever.

Pistol's record seems pretty safe.

PEER PERSPECTIVE

Former Xavier guard Byron Larkin, who ranks 21st on Division I's all-time scoring list with 2,696 points, says: "The thing about being able to score that many points is you're not sneaking up on anybody. It is different when you can score when you are the focus of the opposition's defense. They play junk defenses on you, they play box-and-ones, triangle-and-twos. When you think about all the defenses that Pistol had to face, it's amazing to me that anybody could score at that kind of level. ... There were guys they put in the game just to use five fouls on me. I got it bad—he got it worse. ... For Pistol to maintain that kind of production is amazing. It blows my mind. I couldn't imagine being able to do that."



RUSSELL:AP PHOTO; MARAVICH: MCGOWAN/EMMONS/US PRESSWIRE

9

BILL RUSSELL'S 11 CHAMPIONSHIPS

It's no wonder that, of the eight players with the most championship rings in NBA history, seven were members of the Celtics in the late 1950s and '60s. That's because that period was dominated by arguably the greatest defender in league history, Boston center Bill Russell, whose 11 titles in 13 seasons helped the Celtics set an unmatched standard for pro hoops dynasties. It's also no wonder that the league chose to name the Finals MVP trophy after Russell—the award was first given in 1969, but Russell surely would have had 11 of them.

He did not put up the gaudy offensive numbers of his famed rival, Wilt Chamberlain, but he was considered a master at making the players around him better by blocking shots, playing help defense, throwing outlet passes to lightning-quick point guard Bob Cousy and, of course, rebounding (Russell averaged 22.5 rebounds per game, No. 2 all time). His career scoring average of 16.2 points per game was pedestrian, but as Russell said at last year's All-Star Game, "I didn't care about stats. The most important stat to me was 11."

PEER PERSPECTIVE

Hall of Famer Tom Heinsohn, Russell's former teammate, says:

"He was such a great competitor, and that will always define Bill Russell. We had a lot of parts on our team—Cousy was the ballhandler, I was the scorer, I could always get a shot off—but Russell was the one who held it all together. It all started with him. A lot of people don't

know, but he didn't practice. He would sit and watch practice because he was playing so many minutes during the games. But he could do that because you knew what you were going to get from him once the game started. He was a smart player and just a heck of a competitor."



FOR THE RECORD

It was spring 1962, and for six games, the Celtics had been alternating wins with the Philadelphia Warriors in the Eastern Division finals. Russell had been outstanding in the series, but Chamberlain had been a monster. After averaging 50.4 points per game in the regular season, he put up 35.0 points and 26.6 rebounds in the postseason. When the Celtics took Game 7, Russell was exhausted and requested solitude. "I haven't had any sleep all week," Russell said. "Every time I went out on the court, that guy seemed to grow a little taller."

That, though, seemed to sum up the nature of Russell's meetings with Chamberlain, his biggest rival. Chamberlain was 4 inches taller and 60 pounds heavier than Russell and always posted huge numbers. But Russell posted wins. The two met 142 in NBA games, and Russell's Celtics won 85 of them. They met in the playoffs eight times, and Russell's teams beat Chamberlain's in seven of those series.

— Sean Deveney



Pete Maravich

FOR THE RECORD

Pete Maravich's career average of 44.2 points happened without the benefit of the 3-point line, which wasn't introduced until years after he left LSU.

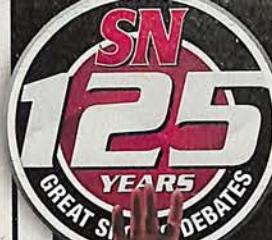
What if, right?

Sam King, who covered LSU for the now-defunct Baton Rouge *State-Times*, eventually answered the question. Years later, King studied play-by-play charts from Maravich's senior season and determined the lanky, floppy-haired shooter averaged 7.2 baskets per game from beyond where the 3-point arc would have been.

So that means, if nothing changed, Maravich would have easily averaged 50 points per game. "His favorite shot was above the top of the key from the right side, and he would just ring it up," King says. "There's no telling what he would have averaged if he'd known it would have been worth three points."

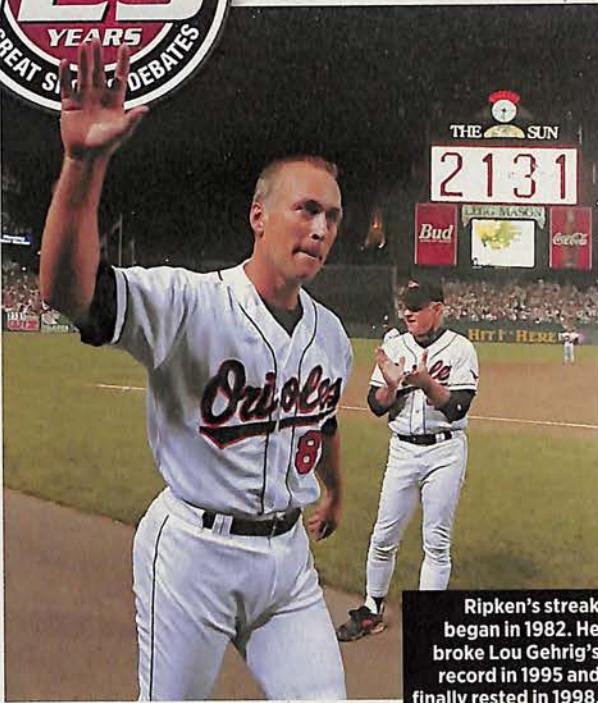
What if, indeed.

— Ryan Fagan



SPORTS' GREATEST RECORDS

What is sports' greatest record?



Ripken's streak began in 1982. He broke Lou Gehrig's record in 1995 and finally rested in 1998.



Ducks F Teemu Selanne, the NHL's active leader in career goals, says: "I think personally Wayne Gretzky's 215 points and 92 goals (in a season) are going to be something that nobody can reach anymore. Hockey has changed, the game has changed, the players have changed, and you don't see those numbers very often anymore."



Rangers LF Josh Hamilton, the reigning A.L. MVP, says: "A 56-game hitting streak and hitting over .400 for a season are crazy, but Cal Ripken's consecutive games streak (2,632) trumps them all. How many years did it take Cal to do that? That is unbelievable."



Will Clark, six-time All-Star and 1989 NLCS MVP, says: "Cal Ripken's streak. The reason is you have to stay healthy for so long and still have the will to go out there every day. When you're healthy it's easy, but when you're banged up it's tough. And you're always banged up from the get-go. And Cal played shortstop and took a lot of contact. It's the whole thing that goes into him playing that many games. Amazing."



Frank Beamer, who is 198-95-2 in 24 seasons as Virginia Tech's football coach, says: "My most remarkable record would be Cal Ripken Jr.'s streak of 2,632 straight games played. ... From toughness physically, to toughness mentally, to being an unselfish team guy trying to help his team win, for all the right reasons, this is the most amazing record of them all."

THE BEST OF THE REST

COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S GREATEST RECORDS

It always comes back to JoePa. It's no longer a record—it's an iconic number that grows year after year.

This fall, Joe Paterno will begin his 45th season as head coach at Penn State with 401 career victories. Neither mark—seasons coached, career victories—will ever be touched.

"Everything stems back to Joe," former Penn State All-American and Pro Football Hall of Famer Jack Ham says. "I don't know if you can ever measure what he's meant to State College and Penn State, the whole university, and to all of college football. He is the greatest; all the wins he has is an amazing achievement."

JoePa isn't alone in his amazing accomplishments—just on top. The top five college football records:

1. Joe Paterno's 401 wins. What coach, in this age of "win now or else," would stick around long enough to reach 200 wins—much less double that? The numbers are staggering: 21 seasons of double-digit victories, five unbeaten seasons, two national titles, 24 bowl victories.

2. Oklahoma's 47-game winning streak. If the 47 wins from 1953-57 aren't impressive enough, consider this: OU posted 23 shutouts during the streak and held opponents to seven points or fewer 34 times. There have been four streaks of 30 wins or more since World

War I, and OU under coach Bud Wilkinson had two of them—including 31 straight from 1948-50. "The guys who played on those teams always talk about the pressure that built as the streak continued, and I think it's that pressure that would keep it from happening again," Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops says. "The increased media exposure and scholarship limits would only add to that stress."

3. Archie Griffin's two Heisman

Trophies. It's not that there hasn't been an opportunity for someone else to become the second player to win the most prestigious individual award in all of sports in back-to-back seasons. Since Griffin won the award in 1974 and '75, 14 nonseniors have won—and only one (Billy Sims, 1979) finished as close as second the following season. (Although the vote difference between Sims and winner Charles White of USC was significant, 1,695 to 773.) "Winning one is so hard to do," says former Florida quarterback Tim Tebow, who won the 2007 Heisman as a sophomore and finished third in the 2008 voting. "Winning two straight is really unthinkable. So much goes into it; everything has to come together as a team and individually."

4. Barry Sanders' 2,628-yard season.

You want impressive? Sanders hit that mark in only 11 games in 1988—and before the NCAA began including bowl games in season



JoePa, 84 and still going strong, got his 400th career win last season against Northwestern.

statistics. If his Oklahoma State team had played today's typical 13-game schedule, Sanders likely would have rushed for 3,000 yards. He had 222 yards in the Holiday Bowl (and didn't play in the fourth quarter) that didn't count toward his numbers—although including those stats would have decreased his NCAA-record 238.9 yards per game average for the season. "He was unbelievable," says Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy, who played quarterback for the Cowboys in 1988. "We will

never see a player like that again, ever. I can't tell you how many 'How did he do that?' looks I saw that season from guys on defense."

5. Nebraska's 35-game bowl streak.

During a run that spanned five decades (1969-2003), 26 of the Huskers' 35 bowl games were considered major bowls. Parity has ended any hope of matching those numbers. Michigan was closest at 33 before its streak ended in 2008.

— Matt Hayes



NASCAR'S GREATEST RECORDS

When you think records in NASCAR, you think Richard Petty. The King's Cup records of 200 wins in a career and 27 in a season (1967) will never be touched, and he shares the record of seven series championships with Dale Earnhardt.

But Petty's most impressive record is a string of 10 straight victories during his watershed 1967 season. No other driver in the history of NASCAR's top series has won more than five races in a row.

1. Richard Petty's 10 consecutive Cup wins.

The streak, which included a victory in the Southern 500 at Darlington, started August 12, 1967, in the 37th race of the season, at Bowman-Gray Stadium in Winston-Salem, N.C. The 10th win came October 1 at North Wilkesboro. "That's pretty stout," says Ryan Newman. "That's getting the job done week in and week out. The 10 in a row—that's tough, and he did it when it was pretty tough racing back in the day."

2. Richard Petty's 27-win season. Petty made 48 starts in 1967 (there are only 36 races per season now) and finished first 27 times, a staggering winning percentage of .563. "I don't know what the cars or competition were like," says Matt Kenseth. "It was a different day, but I'm sure it was hard to win that many races, no matter what the competition was like."

3. Jimmie Johnson's five consecutive Cup championships.

Though the streak is a work in progress as Johnson chases No. 6, the No. 48 team's ability to ward off complacency is mind-blowing. Only one other driver has won as many as three straight titles (Cale Yarborough, 1976-1978). "Winning consecutive championships is such a hard thing to do," Johnson says. "At the end of the day, that's what I'm most proud of."

4. Richard Petty's 200 victories.

As prolific a winner as Petty was, this record is to some degree a function of the starts he made—a record 1,185. "There's no way anyone will get to 200 wins again," says Speed analyst and former Cup driver Kyle Petty, Richard's son. "The way the schedule is today, it can't be done." David Pearson, whose 105 victories rank second to Petty's, did have a higher winning percentage.

5. Richard Petty's and Dale Earnhardt's seven Cup championships.

This record may well be broken, but only two drivers have a chance to do so anytime soon. Johnson (five titles) and Jeff Gordon (four) are the only active drivers with more than two championships. "Jimmie Johnson will reach seven," says ESPN analyst and former Cup champion Rusty Wallace. "I think Jeff has the opportunity to reach it, but Jimmie definitely will. Jimmie's so young (35), and he's got so much time."

—Reid Spencer



SPORTS' MOST DUBIOUS RECORDS

1. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers' 26 consecutive losses.

Not the way you want to start a franchise. Tampa Bay had to wait until Week 13 in 1977 for its first win, 33-14 at New Orleans.

2. Bobby Cox's 158 ejections.

Cox, who managed from 1978-2010—with a four-year break—led his teams to five pennants and one World Series title, but we'll likely remember him for getting tossed.

3. Mark Reynolds' 223-strikeout season.

Reynolds holds the top three spots in the record book for whiffs in a season. (In addition to the 223 in 2009, he also had 211 K's in 2010 and 204 in '08.) Take that, Rob Deer!

4. Bert Blyleven's 50-homer season. When Blyleven allowed 50 in 1986, it was Minnesota's fifth season in the Hubert H. Humphrey "Homerdom." He gave up 46 home runs the following year (No. 3 on the all-time list) when the Twins went on to win the World Series.

5. Rasheed Wallace's 40-technical season. Wallace owns four of the top 10 seasons for technical fouls, including the record-setting 2000-01. He's also the NBA's career leader with 308 regular-season technical fouls.

6. The Philadelphia 76ers' nine-win season. In 1972-73, the Sixers finished 9-73, 59 games behind the first-place Celtics in the Atlantic Division. Keep in mind the NBA had only 17 teams at the time, so talent wasn't thin. Fred Carter (20.0 points per game) was the Sixers' leading scorer.

7. The Pittsburgh Pirates' 18 consecutive losing seasons. The Pirates set the record for the four major North American pro leagues in 2009, then extended it last season. The Pirates' last winning season was in 1992—the last year a slim Barry Bonds played in Pittsburgh.

8. Dave "the Hammer" Schultz's 472-penalty minute season.

Schultz's record, set in 1974-75 with the Flyers, makes second-place Paul Baxter (409 in 1981-82) look like a nice guy. The former Broad Street Bully had another 400-plus-PIM season in 1977-78 before finishing with 2,294 sin bin minutes logged in his career (fourth all-time).

9. The BYU Cougars' 26 NCAA Tournament appearances without a Final Four.

Sometimes a dubious record entails having a hint of success yet not being able to finish the deal. The Cougars have made it to the Elite Eight just once.

10. John Reaves' nine-interception game.

On November 1, 1969, Reaves threw nine picks and his Florida team lost to Auburn, 38-12, the Gators' only loss that season. Reaves finished his career at Florida with 7,549 passing yards and 54 touchdowns.

—Fantasy source staff



Steve Spurrier made 12 starts for the 0-14 Bucs in his final NFL season in 1976.

THE GREAT SPORTS DEBATES

NFL'S 10 GREATEST TEAMS

■ SN's pick: 1972 Dolphins
Readers': 1985 Bears

NHL'S 10 GREATEST TEAMS

■ SN's pick: 1976-77 Canadiens
Readers': 2001-02 Red Wings

COLLEGE BASKETBALL'S 10 GREATEST TEAMS

■ SN's pick: 1966-67 UCLA Bruins
Readers': 1973-74 N.C. State Wolfpack

APRIL 25

■ Sports' 10 greatest records
SN's pick: Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak

MAY 23

■ Sports' 10 greatest game-changers

JUNE 20

■ NBA's 10 greatest teams

JULY 4

■ Baseball's 10 greatest teams

AUGUST 1

■ Sports' 10 greatest individual performances

SEPTEMBER 12

■ College football's 10 greatest teams

OCTOBER 10

■ Greatest sports city of all time

NOVEMBER 21

■ NASCAR's 10 greatest drivers

DECEMBER 5

■ All-125 teams by sport

CAST YOUR VOTE

Make your pick for the best record at sportingnews.com/125. Starting April 25, our 10 records go head to head in a bracket-style elimination game.

FIRST ROUND
APRIL 25

QUARTERFINALS
APRIL 26

SEMIFINALS
APRIL 27

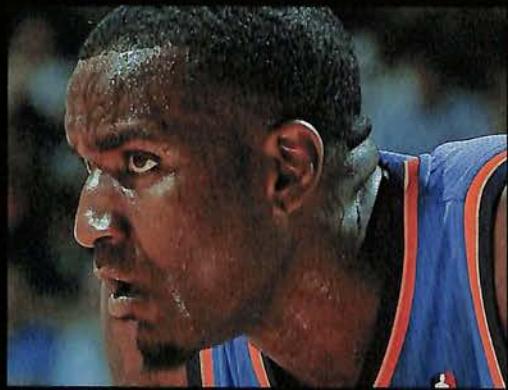
FINALS
APRIL 28



Perkins won't back down from anyone in the West—and the Nuggets' Nene heard about it firsthand.



THE ENFORCER



KENDRICK PERKINS ARRIVED IN OKLAHOMA CITY IN A DEADLINE-DAY TRADE, AND HE BROUGHT WITH HIM DEFENSE AND A MEAN STREAK—AND THE IDEA THAT THE THUNDER CAN BE CONTENDERS IN THESE PLAYOFFS

BY SEAN DEVENEY

There was a little more than 5 minutes to go in the second quarter of the Thunder's early-April game against the Lakers, and center Kendrick Perkins was fighting through a Kobe Bryant screen at the foul line. Bryant held his ground, pressing into Perkins' chest like a running back holding off a blitzing linebacker. Perkins corkscrewed a bit, his folded arms wrapping around Bryant's head in a modified headlock. Bryant pushed away from Perkins and barked at him. Perkins was—as usual—scowling, lead-faced, like

a comic book villain. Both Perkins and Bryant were whistled for technical fouls.

This was nothing new for Perkins, long a technical magnet. In the waning weeks of the regular season, he was T'd up for—among other things—a forehead-to-forehead jawing session with Nuggets center Nene, a shove to the ground he laid on the Raptors' Reggie Evans and a slap of the arm of Jazz forward Paul Millsap as the two were wrestling for rebounding position. In his 17 regular-season games with the Thunder, he accrued seven technical fouls, giving

him the second-highest total on the team for the season.

Ask Perkins about it, though, and you get a sly smile and a *Who, me?* response. "I am not out there trying to get techs," Perkins says. "I am not trying to do anything crazy out there. But when you're playing under the basket, you're going to get tangled up, there are going to be guys banging around under there. I want to be the one banging the hardest, and sometimes that is when the techs are going to come. But one thing I know, I am at home playing the role of the enforcer."

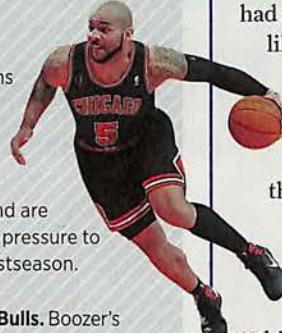
The Thunder are hoping Perkins does just that, with gusto. It's a role he has embraced since the February deadline-day trade that sent him from Boston to Oklahoma City, and though his already impressive slate of technical fouls is the most tangible evidence of the edge that Perkins has given his new team, there have been plenty of other benefits—the Thunder, who struggled to defend inside as well as outside before the arrival of Perkins, have become one of the better defensive teams in the league.

If it's possible that the most important player—the one who also just might be under the most pressure—in the Western Conference playoffs is a guy who averaged 5.1 points and 7.9 rebounds and was on the floor with his team for a mere 429 minutes during the regular season, Perkins is that guy. He has made it a personal quest to change the approach of a nice-guy Thunder bunch that was loaded with skill but lacked nastiness. In fact, he says, his new teammates were so accustomed to seeing his on-court growl, "I had to show the guys that I wasn't really as mean as they thought I was, that I am a nice guy if you know me."



OFFSEASON—AND IN-SEASON—MOVES ARE MADE WITH THE PLAYOFFS IN MIND

Kendrick Perkins and Jeff Green are not the only players who switched teams in the past year and are now feeling some pressure to perform in the postseason.



Carlos Boozer, Bulls. Boozer's injury history has left him with a reputation for softness, but that doesn't apply to the postseason, where he averaged 20.3 points and 12.5 rebounds in 44 games with Utah. The Bulls shelled out nearly \$80 million over five years for Boozer last summer—they're counting on him to perform like he has in the past.

Mike Bibby, Heat. The point guard spot has been a mystery all season for Miami, so when the Hawks traded Bibby and then the Wizards released him in February, the Heat scooped him up. They don't need Bibby to play staunch defense or rack up double-digit assists—they just need him to make perimeter shots.

Hedo Turkoglu, Magic. He has been in steady decline over the last few years, and, at age 32, it is safe to say he is not going to bounce back. But Turkoglu is still a big (6-10), versatile wing threat, and the Magic—who traded for him in December—need him to recapture the form he showed back in 2009, when he helped lead Orlando to The Finals by running the offense at critical times and making clutch shots.

Tyson Chandler, Mavericks. After two injury-plagued seasons and on his third team in as many years, Chandler is finally healthy and has proved the Mavericks knew what they were doing when they traded for him in the offseason. His energy and defense inside have been key for Dallas, but as the Mavericks play against the big teams in the West, Chandler will need to stay healthy and out of foul trouble while giving Dallas something offensively.

— Sean Devaney

Oklahoma City has a pair of outstanding young pieces, All-Star point guard Russell Westbrook and fellow All-Star (and two-time scoring champ) Kevin Durant, as well as supersub James Harden and 21-year-old shot blocker Serge Ibaka. But the Thunder had never had a strongman, a guy willing to put the likes of Kobe Bryant into a headlock when the time came.

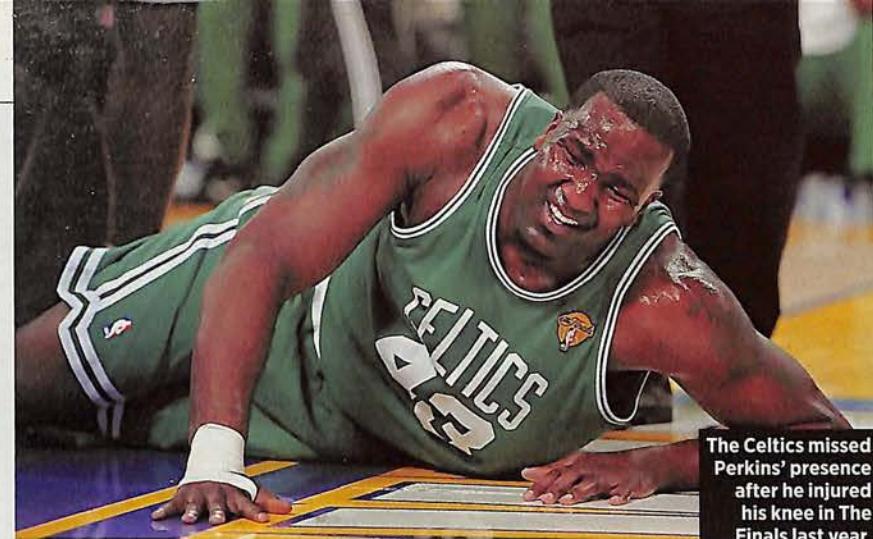
Until now, at least. Perkins—who won a championship with the Celtics in 2008—could be just the missing piece this team needs. The Thunder have a chance to be a great team, not just in the long term but immediately in these playoffs, and Perkins feels some pressure to kick-start that ascension. "I put it on myself, though," Perkins says. "Pressure can be a good thing because it makes you stay focused and makes you work a little harder. If I am going to come in and say I want to be a leader and I want to really help this team be a great defensive team, then, OK, it's on me. I said I was going to do it, so I have to go out and do it."

So far, so good. After putting Perkins in the middle of the defense (he made his debut on March 14 because he was out with a knee injury when he was traded), the Thunder saw the points they allow per game drop from 101.8 to 97.9 in the 17 regular-season games he played. They've seen just about every defensive metric improve, too. And now they have a hint of meanness.

"He plays with a lot of anger, he plays with a lot of toughness, he does not like other teams, and we like that," Thunder coach Scott Brooks says. "He shows you how he feels, and it's not happy."

Not happy? Hey, Perkins is entitled.

Few players in the league have endured the kind of 12 months he has had. His Celtics were on the verge of another championship last year, up 3-2 on the Lakers with the final two games in L.A., when he was battling for a rebound with Lakers center Andrew Bynum in the first quarter of Game 6, landed awkwardly and tore two ligaments in his knee. Without him, the Celtics lost the final two games and the championship. Perkins put in a long summer of work—Celtics coach Doc Rivers said he had never seen a player work as hard at rehab—and returned to a



The Celtics missed Perkins' presence after he injured his knee in The Finals last year.

heartwarming standing ovation at the TD Garden in late January.

A month later, he was gone, traded from Boston, where he had grown from an 18-year-old to a dirty-work big man who was beloved by what he calls "real working-class fans." He was headed to Oklahoma City, a place he admittedly knew little about. It was hard, it was emotional—Perkins cried, but he has filed all that away. Now he is just showing you how he feels. And it's not happy.

"I am playing with a chip on my shoulder, definitely," Perkins says. "It's not fun for anybody to get traded. But you have got to understand that one man's trash is another man's treasure. So your goal is to do as much as you can for the team that wants you. There's no love lost for Boston. I had some wonderful years there, and the players and Doc, they know I am always going to support them.

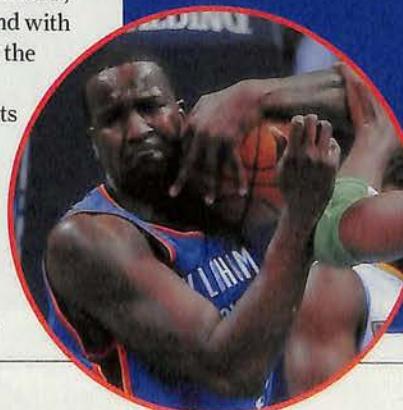
But do I have a chip on my shoulder? That's right I do. I want to show them they made a big mistake letting me go."

Check with just about any contending team in the Eastern Conference and they'll express gratitude to the Celtics for sending Perkins elsewhere. Heat forward Chris Bosh talked about Boston's missing element without Perkins. Bulls coach Tom Thibodeau said, "What he meant to their defense—he is just real tough to replace." Magic coach Stan Van Gundy added, "He was a big part of their whole identity and the way they played. He was a big part of their toughness; he gave them a physical presence."

Perkins now is focused on doing that for the Thunder. When he was still upset about the trade, one thing that comforted him was a conversation with Oklahoma City general manager Sam Presti. "He said, 'The one thing I want you to do is

THE D-LIST: SINCE PERKINS' ARRIVAL, THE THUNDER'S OPPONENTS' NUMBERS ARE DOWN.

The addition of Kendrick Perkins has changed the Thunder's attitude, and it has also had a very measurable effect on Oklahoma City's defensive numbers—in more ways than one might think. Perkins has obviously helped the team's defense in the paint, its rebounding numbers and the frequency with which it sends opponents to the free throw line, but his presence has also helped perimeter defenders who no longer have to provide as much inside help. And though Perkins does not block many shots himself, he frees up Serge Ibaka to be more aggressive in pursuing blocks. His average has jumped from 2.2 blocks per game before Perkins' arrival to 3.2 since.



	BEFORE PERKINS	AFTER PERKINS
Opponents' points	101.8	97.9
Opponents' field goal percentage	46.3	43.8
Opponents' 3-point percentage	36.8	33.3
Opponents' free throw attempts	25.1	17.1
Rebounding margin	PLUS-1.5	PLUS-4.8
Opponents' points in the paint	45.6	42.2

— Sean Devaney

to be yourself. Bring the same thing here that you brought to Boston," Perkins says. "And that stuck with me. I don't have to be a scorer. I don't have to change my game. I just have to be myself."

A big part of that has been Perkins' willingness to stand up to anybody at any time. "If we stick together," Perkins says, "we can compete with anyone. We don't have to be scared of nobody. Lakers, Spurs, whoever it is, we don't have a reason to be scared. Guys have to realize we are an elite team."

That attitude has rubbed off on his teammates. "The trade has been the difference," Harden says. "Our confidence is up. Our swagger is up."

Swagger is good, but it won't necessarily lead to a deep postseason run. Oklahoma City is a team still finding its legs. The average age of the starting five is 23.4, and the roster has eight players who are 23 or younger. Perkins (who is 26) signed a four-year contract extension after the trade, and if this group isn't quite ready to be fitted for rings now, Perkins expects it will be by the time he's up for his next contract.

"I would be surprised if we are not playing for a championship by then," Perkins says. "Look at what we have. We have a great coach, a great system, a great organization. We have great players, and I look at part of my job being to make them understand that we can be a great team if we stay together. We can win one, at least one."

Then, maybe, Perkins will finally be happy.

GREEN/ESA/GETTY IMAGES

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN IN THE PRESENCE OF THE CELTICS' GREATS

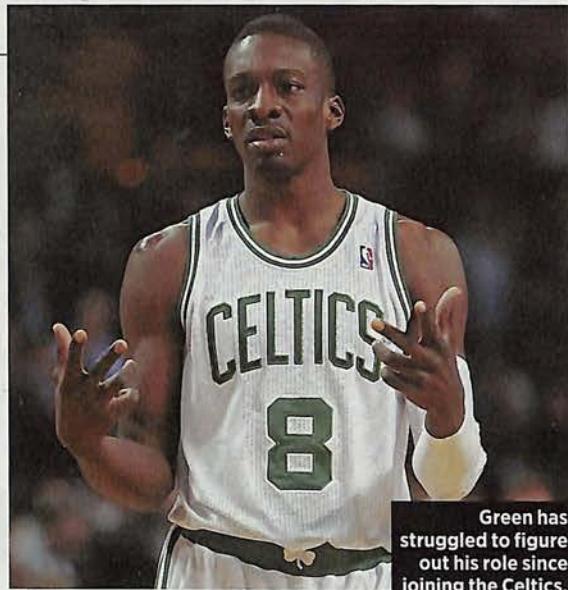
Kendrick Perkins has brought a change of attitude to Oklahoma City, but the big prize the Celtics got in return, forward Jeff Green, has given Boston ... well, no one is quite sure what Green has to offer just yet.

At times, he has looked exactly like the guy the Celtics thought they were getting—a big, versatile wing who can be a matchup nightmare off the bench, in the mold of the Lakers' Lamar Odom. But more often Green has been timid and unsure of where he fits into a Celtics hierarchy that includes Rajon Rondo, Ray Allen, Paul Pierce and Kevin Garnett. Where Perkins has been nasty for the Thunder, Green has been gentle for Boston.

"He's too nice," Celtics coach Doc Rivers says. "He is trying to please the other guys on the floor. I've always thought playing with us is difficult when you're new. Playing with Paul, Ray, Kevin and Rondo, you almost feel like you don't deserve to be as aggressive an offensive player as he should be. I think he does that too much. We're trying to tell him we want him to be aggressive."

Green has grappled with receiving that message. In Oklahoma City, he knew he was the third option behind Kevin Durant and Russell Westbrook, and he averaged 15.2 points with the Thunder this season. In Boston, he averaged 9.8 points in 26 regular-season games and was wildly inconsistent in doing so. He scored 14 or more points six times (including twice at the end of the year when the Celtics rested their starters) but scored seven or fewer points 11 times.

"It's been tough; it's been a learning process," Green says. "If you have the ball and you see Ray (Allen) open or Paul Pierce



Green has struggled to figure out his role since joining the Celtics.

open, you want to give them the ball. Kevin Garnett, all of them. They're Hall of Famers. But they get on me, and Doc gets on me to be more aggressive and play my game. It's just hard to figure out when you should get your shots and when you need to pass."

That's something the Celtics need Green to figure out—and fast. Trading Perkins was not popular in Boston or in the Celtics' locker room. If Perkins is under as much pressure as any player in the West this postseason, Green might be under as much pressure as any player in the East. For the Celtics, the only way to erase the sting of the Perkins trade is for Green to finally become the bench weapon they hoped he would be.

And to do that, he will have to stop being so nice.

— Sean Devaney

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Sporting News Conversation:
ALEX OVECHKIN

With Craig Custance

THE CAPITALS STAR WINGER WASN'T HIMSELF THIS SEASON—SCORING FAR FEWER GOALS AND SHOWING MUCH LESS FLAMBOYANCE—BUT HE THOUGHT MORE ABOUT THE BIG PICTURE, FOCUSING ON TEAM FIRST AND SAVING SOMETHING EXTRA FOR THE PLAYOFFS

Photo by Matt Roth for SN

Last year wasn't easy for Capitals superstar Alex Ovechkin. Sure, he was a Hart Trophy finalist after winning the previous two MVP awards. And he had another 50-goal season, the fourth in his first five years in North America.

But his teams? They didn't fare so well. Team Russia was the biggest disappointment of Winter Olympic hockey, eliminated in an embarrassing blowout loss to the Canadians. Ovechkin's Capitals had a season that ended just as badly, in a first-round upset at the hands of the Canadiens. Making things even worse, archrival Sidney Crosby added an Olympics-clinching goal and a gold medal to a resume that already included a Stanley Cup.

In the mind of Capitals general manager George McPhee, the losing took its toll and was the biggest factor in Ovechkin's slow start this season.

“It might have been a little bit of a hangover from the year before, not having success in the Olympics, not having success in the playoffs,” McPhee says. “It bothered him a lot.”

With the 2011 playoffs under way, Ovechkin is on a mission to change that.

In an interview with *Sporting News'* Craig Custance, Ovechkin discussed the reason behind his shrinking goals total—he finished the regular season with 32—and what it takes to maintain his superstardom while striving to reach the ultimate team success that has eluded him.





ALEX OVECHKIN

SN: So I'm on the flight here, flipping through *Esquire*, and there's an ad for a designer watch. The man in the ad is Wayne Gretzky. He hasn't played in more than 10 years—shouldn't that be you?

OVECHKIN: Well, maybe one day. Maybe one day.

SN: Are you getting closer to that point where your personality and popularity transcend hockey?

OVECHKIN: (Gretzky is) a legend, and everybody knows him like a person, like a hockey player. Me, I don't try to rush time. My time is going to come when everybody is going to know me and I'm going to maybe be in his spot.

SN: Do you hope to get to that level?

OVECHKIN: Of course. Everybody wants to be at the level of Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, Mark Messier. It's kind of like a situation where you have everything in your hand. You just have to work.

SN: You signed with IMG, a marketing powerhouse, in 2009. How has that changed your image?

OVECHKIN: It's changed a lot; they've helped me a lot. They've been a great organization to work with. ... They gave me good advice on how to talk to the media; they give me advice on how to do. When people are going to see me, what I have to do, don't be embarrassing myself (laughs). Most of the time, I know what I have to do because I don't want to change my style. They just give me some advice.

SN: You've always been the one hockey player who hasn't been afraid to show your personality. Has that changed?

OVECHKIN: You have to control yourself more and more if you want to be that kind of player—like Wayne Gretzky. You don't want to show bad stuff.

SN: So are you editing yourself more?

OVECHKIN: Yeah. I know what I have to do all the time. I can show myself if I'm going to do something. I know what I'm going to do. I'm not going to do some stupid things.

SN: Don't you lose a bit of your personality?

OVECHKIN: Every year and every day I'm getting mature and older. I get more experience in life—it's the kind of thing like I know what I have to do on the ice and off the ice.



SN: Has that maturity changed the way you play?

OVECHKIN: It doesn't change the way I play on the ice. When you get older, you know what you have to do. Sometimes you just have to play all the time hard, and sometimes you say, "OK, right now, it's time to just go down and wait a little bit."

SN: In the past, there were veteran opponents who said Alex Ovechkin needed to tone down his game early in the season. You disagreed and said that was how you played the game. When did it set in that you had to change?

OVECHKIN: I think it set in to me last year (when) we played Montreal (in the playoffs) and we lost. I just tell myself sometimes you don't have to play every time 100 percent. If you're going to play six months 100 percent, you're going to be tired and exhausted and you don't have any emotion or any power to play in the playoffs. For us, for hockey players, the most important thing is the playoffs. You want to show your best in the playoffs, not in the regular year or right at the beginning. Good horses start slowly, then they catch up.

SN: Were you exhausted when Montreal eliminated you last spring?

OVECHKIN: Not exhausted, but last year was a tough year for me mentally. The Olympic Games, that kind of was a big shock for me. I think for all Russians. Again, you play Olympic Games, you play all 82 games, and I know they were emotional games, kind of stressful games. Before the playoffs, you need a little bit of rest to concentrate on your game. Last year was not that good.

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SN: You've made it clear that you intend to play in the 2014 Olympics in Russia, even if the NHL decides against allowing its players to compete. Have you had that conversation with Capitals owner Ted Leonsis?

OVECHKIN: No. We didn't have that conversation. It's still almost three years. Let's wait until it's going to be closer before we talk about it.

SN: How long did it take to get over the 2010 Olympics and losing to Montreal?

OVECHKIN: The Olympics were pretty hard to forget about. Montreal, when we lost to Montreal, it was kind of, I don't know how to say—it was pretty hard to forget. But right now, a different season starts. ... The playoffs are a new season. You get so excited—it's probably like the best moment in your life when you play in the playoffs.

SN: Can you describe what it's like to play in the Stanley Cup playoffs?

OVECHKIN: It's pretty hard to explain. It's the most exciting day for everybody, for fans, for us—everybody just goes nuts.

SN: Where were you when Patrick Kane scored the goal that won the Stanley Cup in Game 6 of last year's finals?

OVECHKIN: I was sleeping probably.

SN: You were sleeping?

OVECHKIN: Yeah, because hockey, when I lose a game like that—I didn't watch one game.

SN: You didn't watch one minute?
OVECHKIN: One minute. After that I went to the Internet and watched highlights. But that's it. I want to be in that position. I don't want to be in my position. When I was home, I had fun with my friends and my family, but I want to still play hockey. It was kind of a hard situation.

SN: You're a big fan of the game.
OVECHKIN: Yeah, of course.

SN: How tough was it not to be a part of it with your early elimination?
OVECHKIN: It's life. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. I hope one day we're going to be celebrating.

SN: Someone told me you have \$50,000 worth of autographed hockey sticks in your garage.

OVECHKIN: (Laughing) I don't know about \$50,000, but I have lots of sticks from lots of players.

SN: How long have you been asking other players to sign sticks for you?

OVECHKIN: Since my first year. When you know a couple of the players, this is going to be their last season, you have a chance to take a stick to sign, why not? It's memories, and after, when you're going to be retired, you put it on the wall and say, "Oh yeah, I played with this guy, I played with that guy, I met him." It's the kind of thing that's going to be with you all of your life.

SN: Who is the guy you looked up to most while growing up?

OVECHKIN: I liked Mario Lemieux. I like Lemieux, Owen Nolan, (Jarome) Iginla—that kind of player. Tough, can shoot, fight.

SN: Do you ever talk to Mario?

OVECHKIN: No. I just shook his hand. Not that much.

SN: Do you still get nervous when you're around him?

OVECHKIN: Of course, of course. When you're a little kid, your dream was to look at him in life. Right now, you can shake hands. It's nice.

SN: Have you ever considered how close you came to being a Penguin? What if Pittsburgh had won the lottery instead of Washington in 2004?

OVECHKIN: Almost. I almost (went to the) Penguins. It's different. I'm happy I'm here.

I LIKED MARIO LEMIEUX. I LIKE LEMIEUX, OWEN NOLAN, (JAROME) IGINLA—THAT KIND OF PLAYER. TOUGH, CAN SHOOT, FIGHT.'

SN: As a fan of the game, is it a challenge also being the face of the game?

OVECHKIN: I enjoy it, but I don't give attention to who I am. I think if you're going to give attention to who you are, you're going ... to say, "Life is good. I don't want to work hard anymore." I don't want to be that guy.

SN: Do you worry about getting complacent?

OVECHKIN: Yeah, I want all the time to be at the same level.

SN: How are you dealing with scoring so much less this season?

OVECHKIN: It's something new for me. I just want to think about, not my personal stats, about winning. Of course, everybody wants to win the MVP, everybody wants to be in that spot, but it's time to move forward.

SN: How much do you think about your legacy, your place in the game and concerns that you might lose that spot if your scoring isn't at the same level it used to be?

OVECHKIN: Sometimes you just want to see, you want to be in history. You want to be all-time. ... I don't want to be the guy who wins almost every year but isn't successful as a team. It's something I want to do right now. I want to be successful—not by myself.

SN: Do you worry about being known as the star who can't win the big one?

OVECHKIN: Lots of players play well and they have the opportunity to win the Stanley Cup, and they didn't win and it doesn't matter. Sometimes you have to have luck to win the game and you have to go and play well. It's a team sport; it's not you all by yourself.

SN: After you were blown out by the Rangers early in the season, your G.M., George McPhee, said he sat with coach Bruce Boudreau to change the Capitals to a more defensive system. What were your thoughts when you were presented with the change in style?

OVECHKIN: It's something—if Coach's decision changes the system, I'm not going to say I'm not going to do it. I'm going to be the first guy who's going to try and change it.

JUST ONE QUESTION



For Capitals goalie Semyon Varlamov (through a translator):

How popular is Alex Ovechkin in Russia?

"It's like when Pavel Bure used to play, he was so popular. Ovi has the same status in Russia—if not more."

— Craig Custance



Pavel Bure

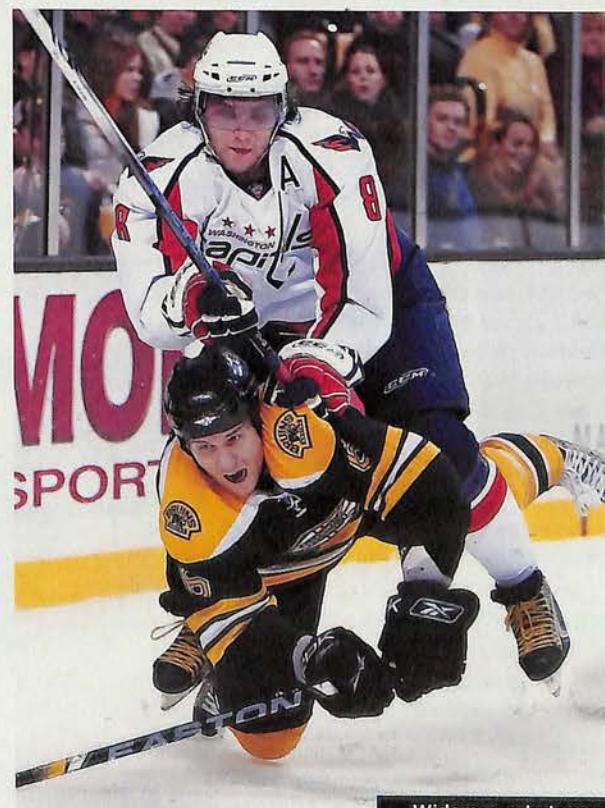
PLAYING AGAINST—AND ALONGSIDE—OVECHKIN

Capitals defenseman Dennis Wideman, who has also played for the Panthers, Bruins and Blues, knows what it's like to see Alex Ovechkin on his own team and on the opponent's.

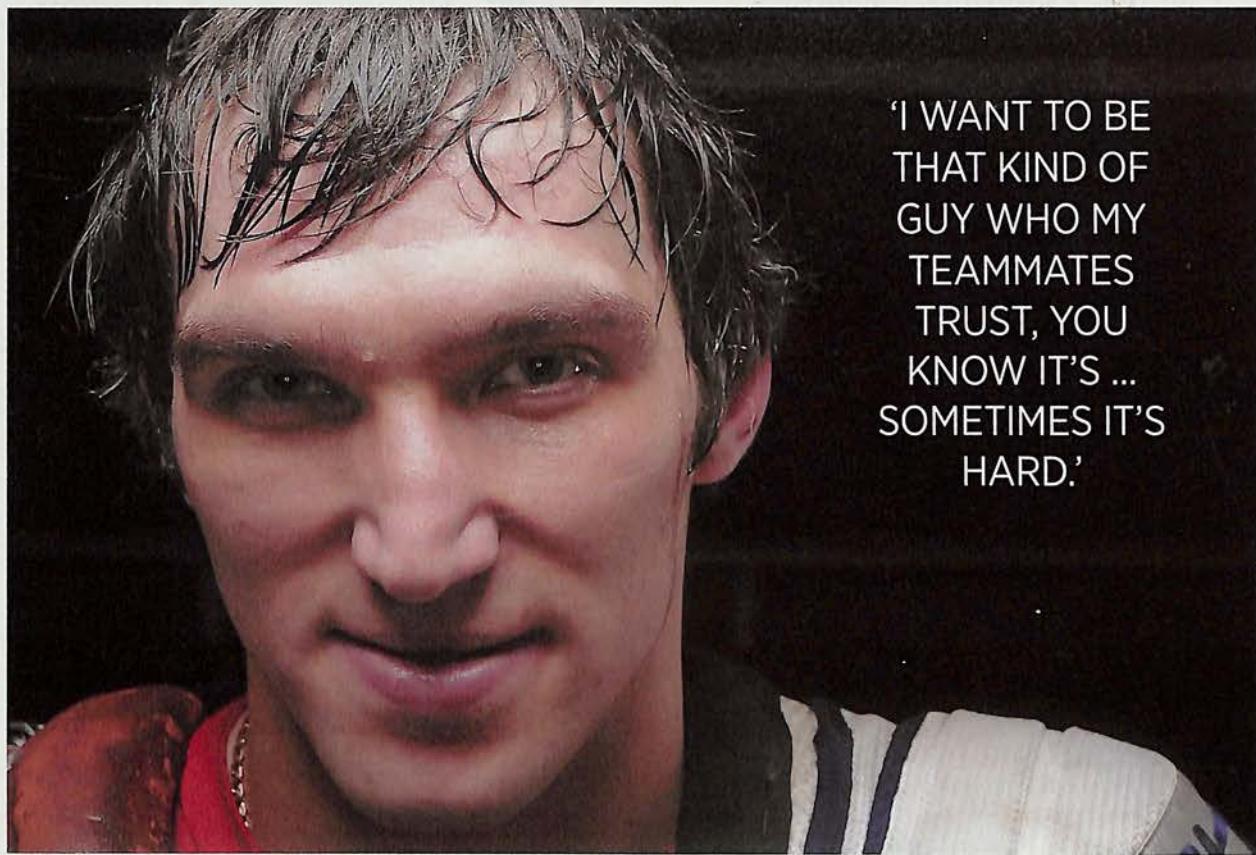
The challenge of defending Ovechkin: "He works so hard, and he's so physical. Usually, when you're playing against top rush-line guys, you can push them around a little bit, push them off the puck. But he's the guy who comes in there and knocks you down and takes the puck. You lose a step on him, he takes it to the net. And obviously, there's his shot."

The best part of playing with Ovechkin: "It's all that other stuff reversed. It's watching him do it to other people. You enjoy watching good players play, whether you're playing with or against him. When you're playing with him, you enjoy watching him play; when you're playing against him, you enjoy the challenge of trying to shut him down. When (top scorers) come down one-on-one, you get a little more excited."

— Craig Custance



Wideman, who's now with the Capitals, knows all about Ovechkin's physical style of play.



'I WANT TO BE THAT KIND OF GUY WHO MY TEAMMATES TRUST, YOU KNOW IT'S ... SOMETIMES IT'S HARD.'

SN: Were you concerned when you transitioned from an offense-first team to one focused on defense and then started losing?

OVECHKIN: Lots of thoughts go through your mind when Coach says something like, "We're going to change and play like this." You need some time to realize how we're going to play. We're doing it at the right time—it was the right decision.

SN: HBO was taping its documentary *24/7* in the midst of the Capitals' struggles early in the season. How would the show be different if they were taping behind the scenes now?

OVECHKIN: No, not different. The same. I think (they) did a great job. It was kind of exciting to us, and the fans love it.

SN: You don't think we'd see a different side of the Capitals?

OVECHKIN: They didn't see how we celebrate our wins. They only see that once. It was kind of a bad situation. They saw how Pittsburgh wins games, and they were pretty funny and we were kind of boring and (HBO) concentrated on our system and our situation.

SN: Did that bother you? You have as good a personality as Max Talbot—and there he was getting all these great clips.

OVECHKIN: It's good for him. Good for him.



Ovechkin hasn't had as many wild goal celebrations this year, a reflection of changes to his team's style of play and his attitude.

SN: What did you think of the way you were portrayed on the show?

OVECHKIN: I think everybody was happy with how they looked. I was happy, too.

SN: It was clear you're close with your parents. What's it like to be a bachelor in Washington, D.C., with your parents living with you?

OVECHKIN: The parents are the most important thing in your life. I want to stay with them as much as I can. They help me a lot. They are my best friends. I can talk to them about anything.

SN: Do they come to all the games?

OVECHKIN: Right now, they're not here. They're in Moscow. But they're here almost every season.

SN: How does that help your comfort level while living in the States?

OVECHKIN: It's comfortable when you come back home, you have food at home, the house is clean and you don't have to worry about that kind of thing.

SN: If you're dating someone and you bring them home and your mom is there, isn't that a problem?

OVECHKIN: Umm (laughing). No comment on this.

SN: When we sit down and look at your career in 25 years, what do you want us to think?

OVECHKIN: You want to be successful like every person, like hockey players in the past. I want to be like Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant—the kind of people who won championships and they're on top of everybody.

SN: You're the captain. You're the leader of this team. When things aren't going well, whom do you turn to?

OVECHKIN: This is my first full year being captain; the guys in the locker room help me a lot. (Mike) Knuble, right now we have (Jason) Arnott, (Scott) Hannan—these kind of people have more experience than me. They help me a lot to tell me what we have to do. They give me advice, and I ask them (for) advice. The group of guys we have right now is unbelievable. This is the kind of experience you always need.

SN: When was the last time you stood up in the locker room and made a speech?

OVECHKIN: Probably a couple weeks ago.

SN: What'd you say?

OVECHKIN: It's all about our group of guys. Nobody wants to know what I said. Why do I have to say what we talk about in the locker room? It's all about our team.

SN: Have you evolved as a captain from the time you first got the "C" until now?

OVECHKIN: I've evolved. I want to be that kind of guy who my teammates trust, you know it's ... sometimes it's hard.

SN: When I saw you in Pittsburgh, you jokingly said if a guy hits someone in the head you would kick him out of the game. Do you feel that strongly about shots to the head?

OVECHKIN: I don't think (anybody) wants to get hurt, but hockey is a physical game and a contact game. If you want to make a hit, you don't want to get the head.

SN: Are you in favor of stricter rules on shots to the head than the NHL has now?

OVECHKIN: I think the rule right now is good, but when somebody is doing it on purpose, you have to take ... like the (Matt) Cooke hit. I think it's an embarrassment (for the game and embarrassment (for) hockey players).

SN: Does a player like Cooke have a place in hockey?

OVECHKIN: He's not a bad player, but sometimes he (does) some stupid things, and players don't like it.

SN: Have you ever had a concussion?

OVECHKIN: No.

SN: With the rise of concussions in the NHL, do you worry about getting one?

OVECHKIN: No. (If) I have it, I have it. That's hockey.

SN: What was going through your mind when David Steckel hit Sidney Crosby, leading to the concussion that forced Crosby to miss the rest of the season?

OVECHKIN: I didn't see it, personally, how it happened. Of course, (Crosby) is one of the best players in the league right now. He had an unbelievable start. It's pretty hard when guys like that get hurt and can't play, but it is what it is.

SN: When Crosby got off to that start people were comparing him to Gretzky and Lemieux—the guys you want to be compared to. Meanwhile, you struggled to start the season. Did the attention he received bother you?

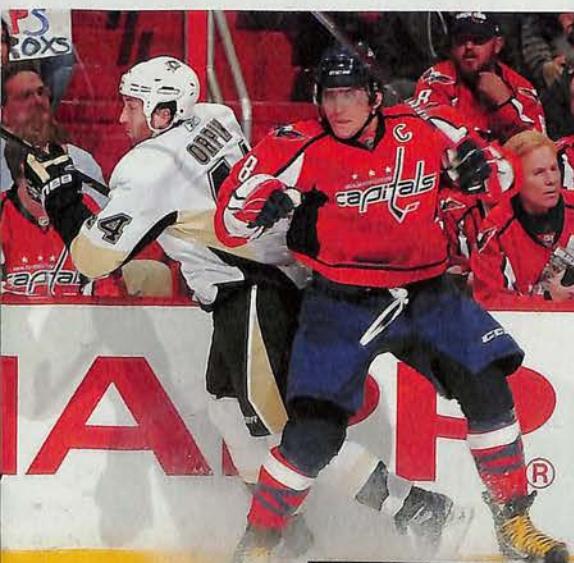
OVECHKIN: If you're going to listen to all the people, you're going to be crazy. Some people will say he's better, you're not, ... I just concentrate on my game; I don't listen to what people say about my game or listen to how people compare.

SN: Isn't it better for hockey and for you to have Sidney out there? To have that rivalry?

OVECHKIN: It's good for hockey, for the league, for players. I think fans get more excited when they know it's us playing against each other.

SN: When was the last time you talked to him?

OVECHKIN: I talked to him at the All-Star Game. No, no Vegas (at the NHL awards show last June).



Ovechkin downplays the Capitals' rivalry with the Penguins—the teams have met only once in the postseason since his arrival.

SN: What's it like when you guys are together?

OVECHKIN: I think we respect each other as persons and players. On the ice, I want to beat him and win.

SN: Do you consider the Penguins your biggest rival?

OVECHKIN: It's not our biggest rival, it's just—(Crosby) is one of the top players in the league, and I think everybody knows a lot of good players play on different teams and everybody gets to play each other. The most important thing is if you get three goals, he gets nothing but you lose, he's still the one who wins. You know, you lose the game.

SN: Is this the best chance for you to win the Stanley Cup in your career?

OVECHKIN: It's our year. Every year we think it's our best year, but you never know what's going to happen.

SN: Yeah, you guys have learned that.

OVECHKIN: (Laughing) Yeah, we know.

SN: With Crosby out and your scoring down, who is the most explosive player in the game?

OVECHKIN: There's so many good players right now. You could say right before the season it was Crosby. Right now, I think (Corey) Perry is doing well.

SN: Is he your Hart Trophy winner?

OVECHKIN: I don't know. (Daniel) Sedin plays well, too. You never know.

SN: You're not going to tell me your pick?

OVECHKIN: No, it's a secret.

SN: Do you think Mike Green will ever win a Norris Trophy?

OVECHKIN: Not this year.

SN: No?

OVECHKIN: Not this year. He has the concussion. In the future, I hope.

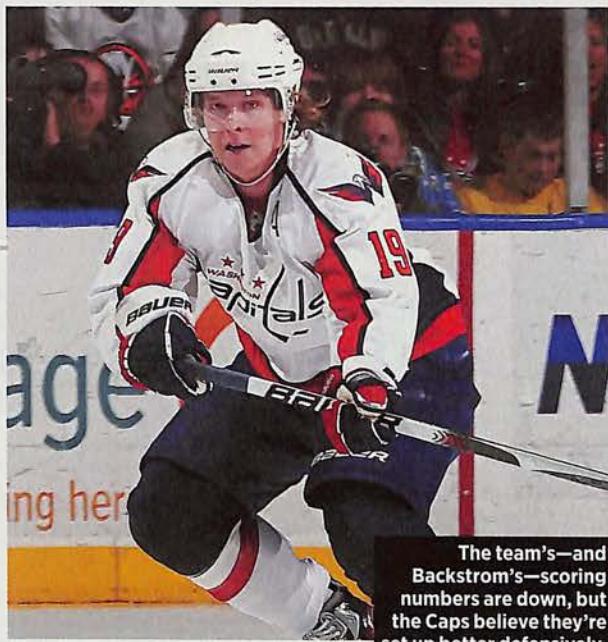
SN: What's the most difficult thing you've had to overcome as a player?

OVECHKIN: You know, the hockey here is very tough. Sometimes you get success. You have to stay at that same level. The most important thing when you get success and the season is over and you're relaxing—it's pretty hard to come back and be again in the same spot. I think every year, you have to play the same way, you have to try and play the same way. You're not going to all the time be like this (raises hand)—it's all the time back and forth.

SN: What keeps you motivated?

OVECHKIN: I don't like losing. I don't want to be a loser.

A CAPITAL DEFENSE—the switch in style has brought balance



The team's—and Backstrom's—scoring numbers are down, but the Caps believe they're set up better defensively.

This was the first season in Alex Ovechkin's NHL career that he didn't score at least 40 goals. He finished with 32, 14 fewer than the previous career low of 46 he posted in 2006-07.

It was a combination of pacing himself and buying into the defensive focus that came courtesy of an early-season mandate from general manager George McPhee. It's also a sign these Capitals are growing up—and putting personal stats behind them.

"Scoring five or six goals a game puts a lot of people in the seats—people get excited, it's a fun game to watch and exciting game to watch—but you have to find the balance between defense and scoring goals," defenseman Dennis Wideman says. "To have that in your back pocket, that you're solid defensively, gives you a better chance."

Coach Bruce Boudreau sees the downturn in offense as a league-wide trend, not just a decision by the Capitals to end their freewheeling ways.

"The goals are down, like everyone else's are down—except for Corey Perry's," Boudreau says. "It's all relative if you ask me."

These playoffs will determine whether the style change was worth it for a Washington team that scored 94 fewer goals than last season. The dramatic shift in stats affected more than Ovechkin:

Nicklas Backstrom, C. The talented Swede had a breakout 2009-10 season, topping 100 points for the first time in his career. He was rewarded with a 10-year contract extension last May. But this season has been different. For the first time since his rookie year, he averaged less than a point per game—and he scored only 18 goals. "If you're going to be successful in hockey, you have to be good at both (offense and defense)," Backstrom says.

Mike Green, D. A concussion cut Green's season almost in half, but there was plenty of evidence preconcussion that he wasn't going to put up the eye-popping offensive numbers that made him a Norris finalist last season. His 76 points led all defensemen last year, and he also outscored eventual Norris winner Duncan Keith by five goals. Green spent a good part of the early season working to find the right mix of offense and defense. "I adjusted my game too much where I wasn't as effective as I used to be," he said before suffering his concussion. "It's about finding balance."

Alexander Semin, F. Semin's production was hurt as much by the system change as it was by injuries. After scoring a career-high 40 goals last season, he dropped off to 28 this year. But he has clicked with new center Jason Arnott and might be the biggest beneficiary of the deal that brought in the Devils veteran at the trading deadline. "All the guys around (Arnott) started playing better," McPhee says.

—Craig Custance



CATCH-22

Alabama's Mark Ingram can train all he wants, but because he lacks home run speed, he'll never be a great NFL running back. But, wait—isn't that the same thing they said about Emmitt Smith?

By Clifton Brown



INGRAM: BOB LEVERONE/SN

Hood pulled over his head, unrecognized by those who pass by, Mark Ingram jogs alongside railroad tracks in New Orleans. His muscular calves shake with every step. He looks more like a boxer than the top running back prospect in the 2011 draft.

Ingram's personal trainer, Wyatt Harris, jogs with him. This is part of their daily routine. Ingram relocated to the Big Easy in January so he could train with Harris. Yet nothing is easy about the way Harris pushes athletes. He believes in tough love.

"A lot of pro guys won't put up with me," Harris says, smiling. "I'm the gorilla in the room. You want a yes man, hire somebody else. I set a tempo that's crazy."

But for Ingram, it all makes perfect sense. Hiring Harris as his full-time trainer is part of a grand plan. Ingram wants to be one of those NFL backs you need mention with only one name: Emmitt, Barry, Walter.

Those backs paid the price to be what they were. That's why Ingram is spending his days, and some of his evenings, at the Sonic Boom Speed Conditioning and Strength Training Academy run by Harris—and not in the French Quarter.

Ingram hungers for greatness. Shrimp gumbo can wait.

"A complete back, that's what I want to be," says Ingram, sitting on a weight bench after a grueling training session. "A guy who does it all. A three-down back. A back who you never have to take out of the game."

It's not like Ingram lacks tools. He won the Heisman Trophy as a sophomore in 2009 and led Alabama to a national championship. Give Ingram the rock and yards follow. It has always been that way. As a ninth-grader at Grand Blanc High in Michigan, he was already playing with the varsity.

"I'd like to take credit for Mark's running ability, but I can't," says Joe Delaney, Ingram's coach from ninth to 11th grade, before Ingram transferred and graduated from Flint Southwestern Academy. "He was special by the time I got him."

But can Ingram be special in the NFL? He has doubters, mainly because his speed doesn't blow you away. He ran a 4.62 40-yard dash at the NFL Scouting Combine, then between a 4.47 and a 4.53 at his Alabama pro day. OK, but not eye-opening. Some scouts believe Ingram's

need for speed will limit him to being just a good NFL back.

"He has tremendous balance with a low center of gravity, hard to knock off his feet," says a former NFL general manager. "He just doesn't have the home run speed. If he had that, he'd be a top 10 pick. It's possible he could fall into the second round."

Talk like that infuriates Harris and motivates Ingram. Regardless of where he is drafted, Ingram is determined to leave an indelible imprint on the NFL. Besides, where a running back is drafted in today's NFL hardly guarantees success. Arian Foster, who won last year's rushing title, was undrafted. So was the leading rusher among rookies, LeGarrette Blount.

Ingram says he has spent little time worrying about the draft. It's his career that matters. He did not hook up with Harris just for the Combine or the draft. He wants to maximize his talents over the next 10 years.

"Let's face it—everybody wants to be the No. 1 pick," Ingram says. "I've broken long runs since I've been playing football. I expect to do it on the next level as well. When people say I'm not a home run hitter, what do I say? Honestly, I laugh at it. I had a whole bunch of 30-, 40- or 50-yarders. There weren't a whole lot of times when I was caught from behind."

Ingram, who had 31 plays of 20 yards or longer the past two seasons at Alabama, has three qualities that no one questions: acceleration, vision and power. His 10-yard split at the Combine—1.55 seconds—was impressive. The ability to hit top speed in a wink is a key to his success. That's why he moves chains faster than the guy selling gold necklaces on the corner.

"Mark has functional speed like Jerry Rice," Harris says. "He wasn't the fastest guy in the world, but when he got on the field, nobody could cover him. If you want to see what kind of football player somebody is, go to the tape. When they say Mark doesn't have home run speed, I say this: 'Are you watching his games?'"

Ingram is often compared to Hall of Fame back Emmitt Smith. Not in the sense that Ingram is headed to Canton. But similar to Smith, Ingram has an uncanny ability to see holes and get through them. Smith did not have world-class speed, either, yet he is the game's all-time leading rusher. In the view of many scouts, Ingram's ability to run between the tackles could make him a special NFL back.

"He's got a knack for knowing where the first-down marker is, for knowing where the end zone is, and getting there," says an NFC scout. "He's a very instinctive runner. His 4.6 speed is not surprising. That's what he is. But initial quickness, lateral quickness, ability to make people miss, instincts, catching the ball—he's just a very productive player."

Ask Ingram how he became so adept at finding creases and he cannot totally explain it. Basically, it's something he's always had.

"Things that I see on the field have nothing to do with my athletic ability," Ingram says. "That's just God-given ability. Sometimes I don't know exactly how I'm going to do it. But I do it."

Harris wants to squeeze even more out of Ingram's talent. Ingram has good hands, but he wants them to be better. So every day, he works on pass-catching drills. He wants future NFL coaches to have no excuse to replace him in passing situations.

Ingram is down to a chiseled 215 pounds, 10 lighter, he says, than he was in his last game at Alabama. Watching Harris punish Ingram, it's easy to see why his body has become a no-fat zone. The 4-mile jog Ingram had in the morning was just a warmup. Now Ingram gets in his SUV and makes the short drive to Sonic Boom, and the real fun starts.

Harris blows his whistle. Ingram and Texans wide receiver Jacoby Jones take turns running sprints. They are wearing 15-pound vests. They look tired. Harris does not. "Great job, Mark," Harris finally concedes. Ingram nods.

Harris has several NFL clients, including Jones and Saints players

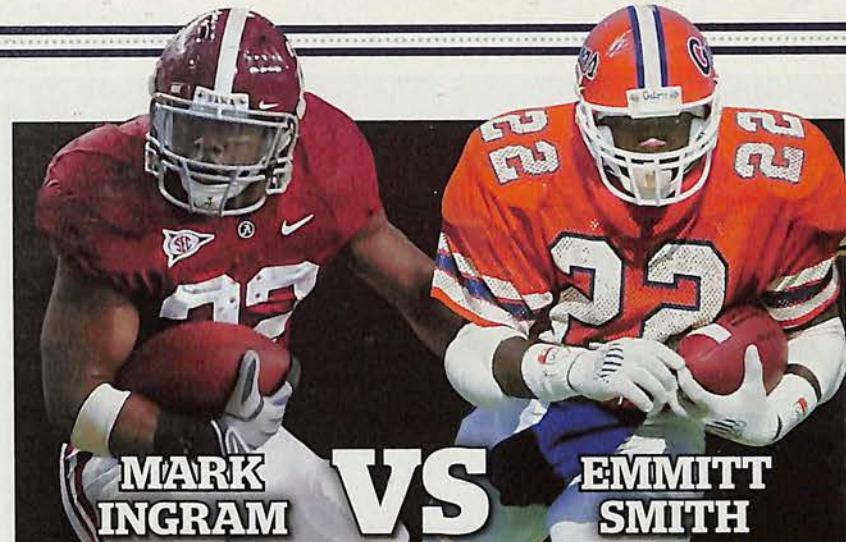
Devery Henderson, Robert Meachem and Tracy Porter. But Ingram is the first who came to Harris as a celebrated college star. Harris will temporarily move to the location of Ingram's first NFL team and plans to work with him throughout his rookie season.

"If Mark wants to be the best, it's going to take eight or nine straight years of really not having as much fun as you want to have," Harris says. "You can't have a serious night life. You have to make a lot of personal sacrifice. When a lot of guys start making that money, they don't want to make that sacrifice. But if you want this, you got to do it right. Jerry Rice did it. Walter Payton did it. He wasn't a speed guy. It's been done. Let's do it."

Ingram buys into that thinking. The draft process has been grueling and hectic—the Combine, his pro day, private workouts with several teams and, of course, the daily grind with Harris. But Ingram sees first downs in his future. He sees a rushing title. He sees a Super Bowl. Those visions keep him going when Harris blows his whistle, asking for another sprint. Ingram figures he's taking the right path. The path to greatness is not supposed to be easy.

"Even if I'm the last pick in the last round, it's a blessing and a lifetime opportunity," Ingram says. "This is what I've wanted since I was a little boy. I know everybody's bigger, faster and stronger. I'm sure the schemes are more complex. But I'm going to be the best back I can possibly be. That's the competitor in me."

"If you don't pick me, I'm going to make you wish you didn't have to play against me."



A FAVORABLE COMPARISON

Yes, his speed is a concern, but maybe NFL teams looking for a running back shouldn't let Mark Ingram slip past them. He looks an awful lot like a guy whose name is all over the NFL record book.

5-9/215	HEIGHT/WEIGHT	5-9/210
2009 at Alabama: 1,650 yards and 17 TDs on 271 attempts	BEST COLLEGE SEASON	1989 at Florida: 1,599 yards and 14 TDs on 284 attempts
No. 1	SN'S RANK AMONG RBS IN DRAFT	No. 3
Has good strength, competitiveness, toughness, balance and agility.	STRENGTH, ACCORDING TO SN'S DRAFT ANALYSIS	Has incredible balance and ability to find the open hole and avoid tacklers. A versatile player.
In 2010, he battled a left knee injury throughout the season and was not the same player as in 2009. Ingram is not an elite athlete with big-play explosiveness and speed.	WEAKNESS, ACCORDING TO SN'S DRAFT ANALYSIS	Lacks the breakaway speed of a feature back. Seemingly susceptible to injury.

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RUNNING LATE

The game has changed—more passing and split carries—and so has draft strategy. There's no rush to pick a running back in the first round.

By Clifton Brown

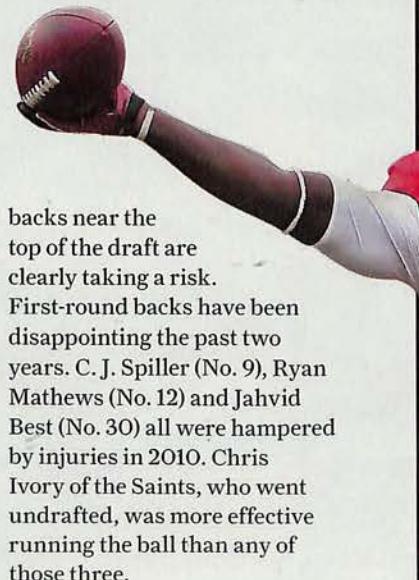
When drafting a running back, you don't have to pick high to pick well. Arian Foster of the Texans entered the league as an undrafted free agent in 2009 and won the rushing title last season. LeGarrette Blount of the Buccaneers was undrafted in 2010 and led all rookies in rushing yards.

No wonder teams have become more reluctant to burn a top 10 pick on a running back.

"You have to be a phenomenal talent to go in the top half of the first round as a running back," says a former NFL general manager. "Most people think you can find a good back in any round."

Mark Ingram of Alabama and Mikel Leshoure of Illinois are generally considered the top two backs in this year's draft. But that doesn't mean either will go early in the first round.

Teams that commit to running



backs near the top of the draft are clearly taking a risk. First-round backs have been disappointing the past two years. C. J. Spiller (No. 9), Ryan Mathews (No. 12) and Jahvid Best (No. 30) all were hampered by injuries in 2010. Chris Ivory of the Saints, who went undrafted, was more effective running the ball than any of those three.

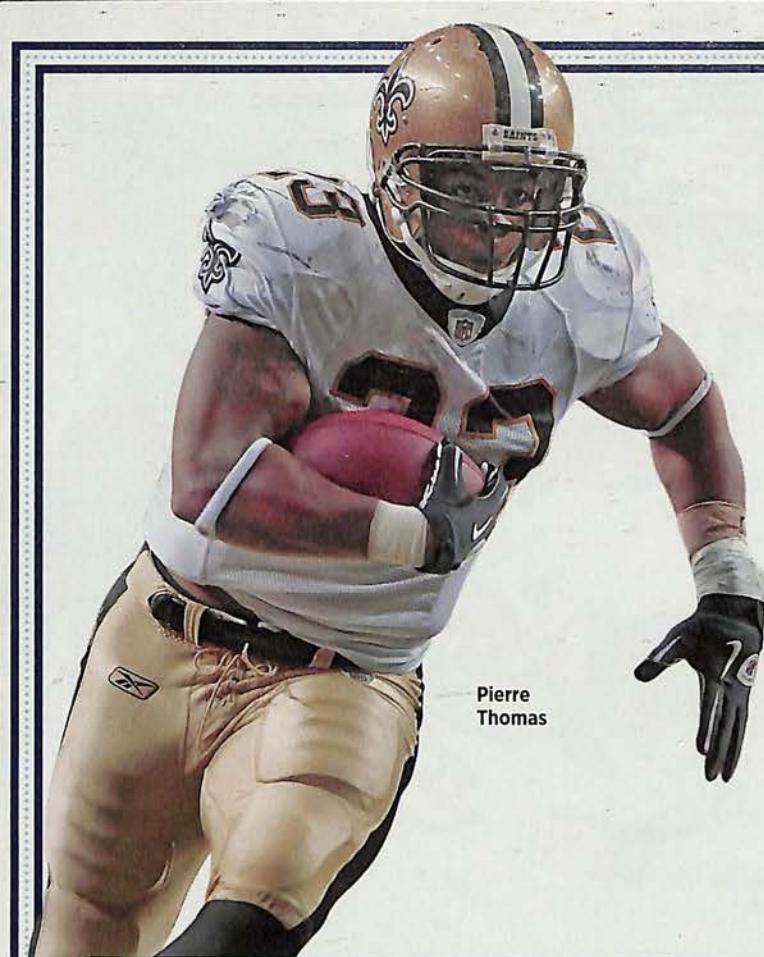
Knowshon Moreno, Donald Brown and Beanie Wells all went in the first round in 2009, and none of them set the world on fire, either.

Of the 17 backs who rushed for 1,000 yards last season, only three were top 10 picks—Cedric Benson (No. 4, 2005), Darren McFadden (No. 4, 2008), and Adrian Peterson (No. 7, 2007).

Rather than relying on one back, teams often identify what



Foster and Blount (left) are two recent examples of teams' finding high production without using a high pick.



Pierre Thomas

backs do best and use them specifically for those roles. Though backs like Foster, LeSean McCoy of the Eagles and Ray Rice of the Ravens have proved to be effective receivers, even the best runners often are replaced in passing situations in today's NFL.

The complete back has been replaced by the specialized back. And in some ways, that has devalued the importance of having a star at the position. The Packers won the Super Bowl last season without a 1,000-yard rusher. The Saints, Seahawks and Colts made the playoffs without one.

More reasons teams should question using a top 10 pick on a running back:

ATTRITION

Production starts dropping off for most running backs by age 30, at the latest. And that deterioration can be rapid, especially if a back is given too much work too soon. Draft a franchise quarterback or a stud left tackle and you can expect at least 10 years of quality production. But for a running back, there's a shorter window at the peak of his career.

"If you ask a back to do everything, it's hard for him to sustain it more than a few years," says an NFL personnel executive. "Now you take the load off of one back and mix and match other backs."

TWO-BACK SYSTEMS

Fifteen teams had two running backs with at least 100 carries last season. That's almost half the league making a serious commitment to two backs, and the Cowboys rotate three backs when they are healthy.

There are goal-line backs, third-down backs, pass-catching backs, speed backs and power backs. What about the workhorse, do-everything running back? Put him on the endangered species list.

"What we're seeing is running by tandem throughout the NFL," says NFL Network draft analyst Mike Mayock. "You either get a couple of guys who can split the load, or you get two different kinds of guys. You get that two-down guy, the bigger, downhill, one-cutback (guy), and complement him with a third-down change of pace guy."



FINDING VALUE WITHOUT THE FANFARE

Some of the less heralded backs entering the NFL lately have made the biggest impact. Ten backs who come without the hype but could make a nice transition into the league:

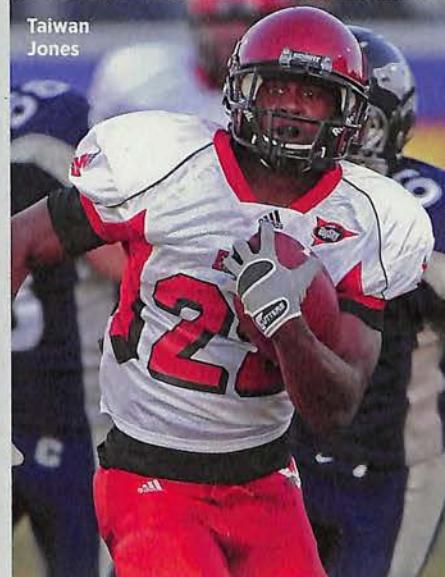


ALLEN BRADFORD, USC

What scouts like: Bradford (5-11, 242) has the makings of a short-yardage, goal-line specialist. He also could be an effective lead blocker as a fullback. He has deceptive speed, which he demonstrated by running a 4.58 in the 40 at the Combine.

ALEX GREEN, HAWAII

What scouts like: With good hands and solid cutting ability, Green could be a classic third-down back. His 8.2 yards per carry was the best among running backs last season.



KENDALL HUNTER, OKLAHOMA STATE

What scouts like: Hunter (5-7, 199) has drawn comparisons to Dexter McCluster of the Chiefs and Darren Sproles of the Chargers. He isn't an every-down player but has the ability to turn short passes into bigger plays.

TAIWAN JONES, EASTERN WASHINGTON

What scouts like: He could be the fastest running back entering the league; he ran a reported 4.33 40 at his pro day. His first college carry went for 87 yards, and he had a 93-yard kickoff return. At 6-0, 194 pounds, he can also run inside.



DERRICK LOCKE, KENTUCKY

What scouts like: He is a former track guy, so his speed is legit. His hands are good enough that he can play some slot receiver. Add Locke (5-8, 188) to the list of smaller backs who should find a niche if he stays healthy.

DEMARCO MURRAY, OKLAHOMA

What scouts like: His ability to pick up blitzing linebackers is better than most young backs'. Murray also has excellent hands. Teams that like throwing to their backs will be intrigued by his skills.

LATE-ROUND FINDS

The list of 1,000-yard rushers last season includes back-of-the-draft selections Michael Turner (fifth round), Ahmad Bradshaw (seventh) and Peyton Hillis (seventh). That gives hope to backs not expected to go in the first two rounds in this year's draft, like California's Shane Vereen.

"I'm looking for an opportunity to show a team what I can do," Vereen says. "A lot of backs have come in and done well lately, regardless of where they were picked."

Vereen is the kind of back some scouts believe could be better in the NFL than he was in college.

"Vereen's a versatile back that can run, block or catch," says an NFL scout. "All these backs in college need a little refinement in blocking. But he's got very good quickness, a natural runner. Very productive, very instinctive, competitive. And not as much mileage on him as some of these other guys."

"You could make a case that Vereen might have a chance to have a longer career. That's just speculation. But some scouts believe that there is an odometer on these guys."

A SHIFT TOWARD PASSING

Passing has become much more prevalent during recent seasons. In 2000, only 13 quarterbacks passed for more than 3,000 yards. Last season, 22 quarterbacks threw for at least 3,000 yards. With teams going to more multiple-wide receiver sets, running backs aren't in the game as much as they used to be.

"The nature of the game is continuing to go more toward passing and spread formations," the NFL executive says. "There's not as much of the traditional I-formation football. You need a back with versatility or a group of backs."

"Look at the Saints. They draft Reggie Bush with the second pick. He's exceptional at what he does, but then they get a free agent, Pierre Thomas, who ends up being their main ballcarrier (in 2009). They combined two guys who came from opposite ends of the spectrum to get what they needed to win a Super Bowl."

At least two running backs have been selected in the first round of every draft since 1984, but that streak could end soon if it does not happen this year.

When it comes to finding a running back in the draft, fewer teams feel the need to rush.

SEVEN FREE-AGENT BACKS FOR SEVEN ROLES

If a team decides not to address its running back need in the draft, there are plenty of free agents in the league who can help in a specific capacity:

BEST SPEED: AHMAD BRADSHAW, GIANTS. He proved he was much more than "Fire" as he worked his way up from change-of-pace No. 3 to handle a more featured role, fighting through some fumbling issues in the process. At 25, he's not that much older than the rookie options.

BEST POWER: MICHAEL BUSH, RAIDERS. Whenever often-injured Darren McFadden has been out of the lineup, Bush has delivered pretty well. His big frame (6-1, 245) should be attractive outside of Oakland.

BEST POWER/SPEED COMBO: DEANGELO WILLIAMS, PANTHERS. He can explode for big plays and finish strong in the red zone. A long, restful offseason favors him as he works to come back from a foot injury.

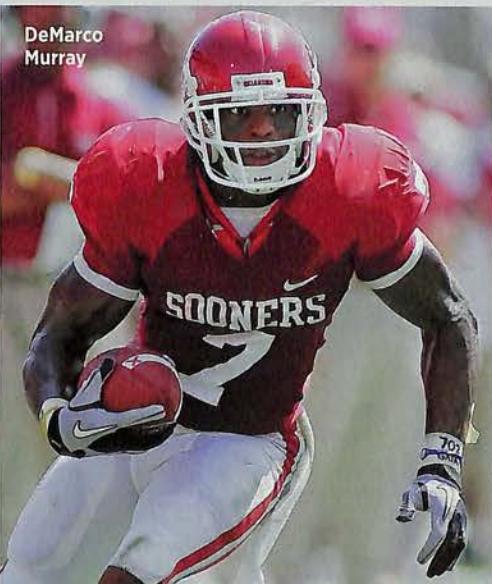
BEST WORKHORSE: CEDRIC BENSON, BENGALS. Cincinnati officials will do their best to bring him back because new offensive coordinator Jay Gruden is planning to give him a heavy load. But Benson is a good value for other teams looking for a more traditional back.

BEST ON THIRD DOWN: DARREN SPROLES, CHARGERS. He's been an electric cog in San Diego and has had limited wear at age 27. As the ultimate spark plug, he can bring life to both a passing and return game.

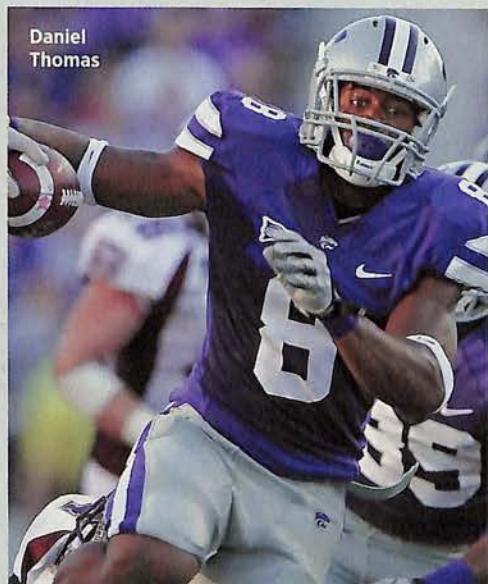
MOST VERSATILE: RONNIE BROWN, DOLPHINS. He will hit 30 in December, and there are some injury issues, but when he's on the field, he is a hard runner, good receiver and, to boot, a decent passer.

BEST BLOCKER: VONTA LEACH, TEXANS. He didn't carry the ball once last season, but he made the Pro Bowl in a very important role: paving the way for the NFL's leading rusher, Arian Foster. At a fading, unsung position, Leach is the best option.

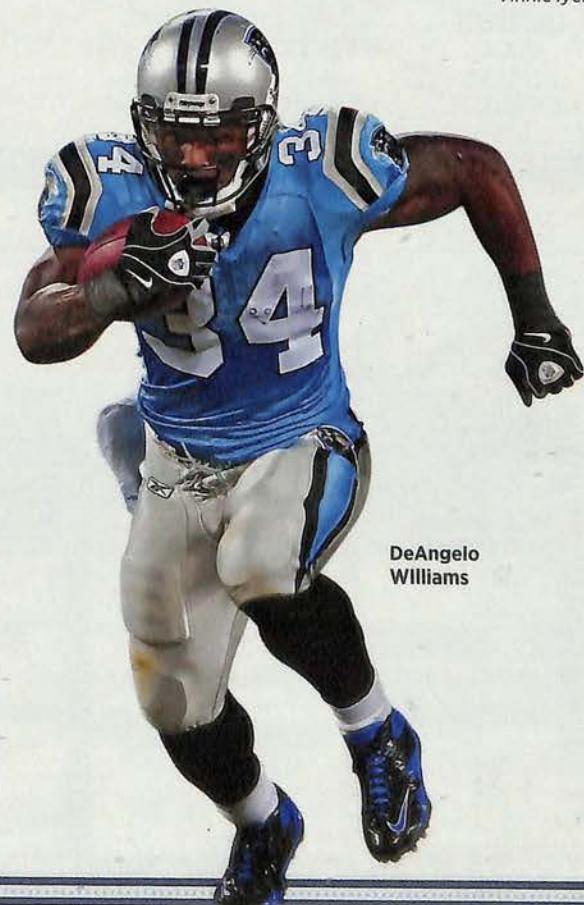
— Vinnie Iyer



DeMarco Murray



Daniel Thomas



DeAngelo Williams

JACQUIZZ RODGERS, OREGON STATE

What scouts like: He is superb at changing direction, which makes him elusive in the open field. His power is deceptive for a diminutive back (5-6, 196). Though he might last until the third round or later, he could be a feature back in the right system.

DANIEL THOMAS, KANSAS STATE

What scouts like: He has the potential to be an effective workhorse. He has nice size (6-0, 230) and runs with power between the tackles. He could be next season's LeGarrette Blount.

SHANE VEREEN, CALIFORNIA

What scouts like: His style has been compared to Ravens running back Ray Rice's—a dual threat who can hurt defenses running the ball or catching it. Vereen lacks breakaway speed but could be a three-down back.

RYAN WILLIAMS, VIRGINIA TECH

What scouts like: He has exceptional vision. A hamstring injury hurt his productivity last season, but Williams could be better as a pro than he was in college if he stays healthy.

— Clifton Brown

BIG GAINERS WHO CAME WITH SMALL EXPECTATIONS

(TOTAL PLAYERS WHO RUSHED FOR 1,000 YARDS)

FOR THE PAST DECADE, THERE HAS BEEN NO SHORTAGE OF 1,000-YARD RUSHERS, AND SEVERAL OF THOSE BIG SEASONS HAVE COME FROM RUNNING BACKS DRAFTED AFTER THE THIRD ROUND.



ARIAN FOSTER
TEXANS (UNDRAFTED)
1,616 YARDS

MICHAEL TURNER
FALCONS
(FIFTH ROUND)
1,371

AHMAD BRADSHAW
GIANTS
(SEVENTH ROUND)
1,235

PEYTON HILLIS
BROWNS
(SEVENTH ROUND)
1,177

BENJARVUS GREEN-ELLIS
PATRIOTS
(UNDRAFTED)
1,008

LEGARRETTE BLOUNT
BUCCANEERS
(UNDRAFTED)
1,007

(15) DRAFT

(16) DRAFT



PARKER
1,494
RUDI JOHNSON
BENGALS
(FOURTH ROUND)
1,309

CHESTER TAYLOR
VIKINGS
(SIXTH ROUND)
1,216

WILLIE PARKER
STEELERS
(UNDRAFTED)
1,316

JACOBS
1,009

(17) DRAFT

(18) DRAFT

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(34) DRAFT

2010

2009

2008

2007

2006

2005

2004

2003

2002

2001

— Clifton Brown

FOSTER: REINHOLD MATAY / AP; GRANT: KEITH STRICKER / AP; TURNER: DAVE MARTIN / AP; PARKER: LUC LECLERC / US PRESSWIRE; JOHNSON: RUSTY KENNEDY / AP; DAVIS: BOB LEVERONE / SH; HOLMES: ALBERT DICKSON / SH

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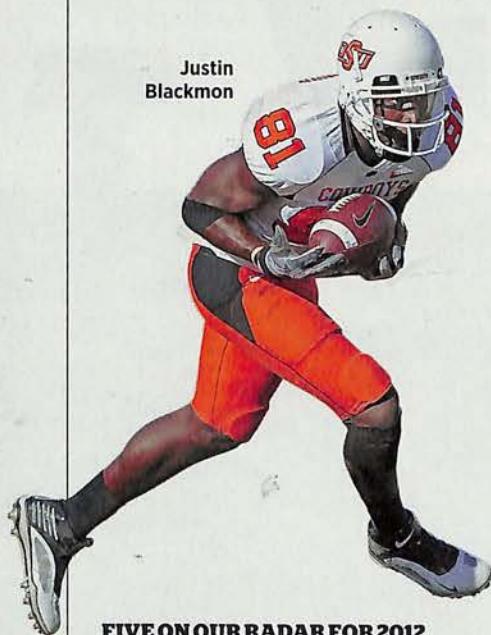
SCOUT & ABOUT

AN NFL COLLEGE SCOUTING DIRECTOR TAKES SN ON HIS TEAM'S ROAD TO THIS MONTH'S DRAFT

Normally after the draft ends, there's a rush to sign players who weren't selected. Every team has its scouts—and sometimes its assistant coaches—call players it's interested in signing to rookie free-agent contracts. This year, we won't be able to do that because there's no collective bargaining agreement in effect.

Once the draft is over, all contact with college players will be suspended. We'll be stuck in neutral until we're handed the keys to start it up again.

But we're not going to just sit on our hands. We'll turn our attention to the class of 2012 and start researching it.



FIVE ON OUR RADAR FOR 2012

JUSTIN BLACKMON

WR, Oklahoma State. He has a chance to be better than Dez Bryant. He dominates the game.

JANORIS JENKINS

CB, Florida. He's a shutdown corner.

ANDREW LUCK

QB, Stanford. He would have been the first pick in this year's draft if he had not returned to school.

TRENT RICHARDSON

RB, Alabama. He's a better running back than Mark Ingram.

DRE KIRKPATRICK

CB, Alabama. He's another shutdown corner in the mode of Nnamdi Asomugha.

FIVE NFL-READY PLAYERS FOR 2011

PATRICK PETERSON

CB, LSU. He's a press corner who is a very special athlete. He's going to be a kick and punt returner who will make an immediate impact on special teams. Then he'll be a starting cornerback.

VON MILLER

OLB, Texas A&M. He impacts the game with his ability to rush the passer. Speed is his game. By the end of the season, he should be a 10-plus-sack guy.

MARCELL DAREUS

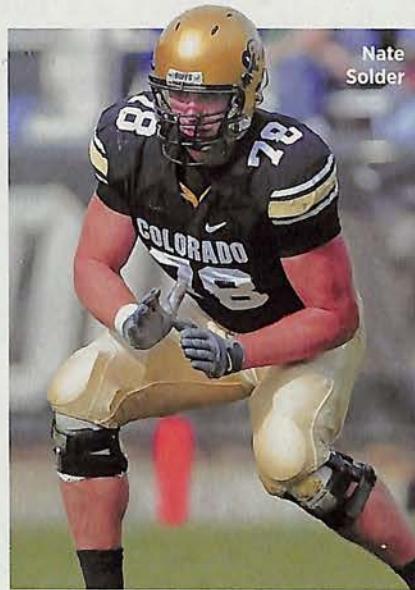
DT, Alabama. He's strong enough to play inside as a tackle and agile and athletic enough to play outside as an end. He's instinctive, he plays with his eyes, and he's always hustling to the ball.

JULIO JONES

WR, Alabama. He's unbelievably competitive. He's got the size (6-3, 220) and speed to match up against anybody in the NFL. The guy has great hands. I'd be shocked if he didn't average 15 to 16 yards per catch next season.

MIKE POUNCEY

C, Florida. Will probably wind up starting at guard. What separates him is his intestinal fortitude. He plays the game with passion and desire. He's got that toughness that you want; he's going to battle you. He'll probably wind up being better than his twin brother (Steelers center Maurkice Pouncey).



FIVE GOOD PROJECTS FOR 2011

CAM NEWTON

QB, Auburn. Physically, he has all the skills. Teammates like him. The question is, can he learn the nuances of NFL defenses? Will a team be patient enough to let him sit back for about two years and let him learn? It's worth the gamble because if you get a Pro Bowl quarterback, you have a lot to build around.

TYRON SMITH

OT, USC. He plays right tackle but has left tackle ability. He's very light on his feet, but he needs to get stronger. He's ready to play; he just needs to learn how to play on the left side.

NATE SOLDER

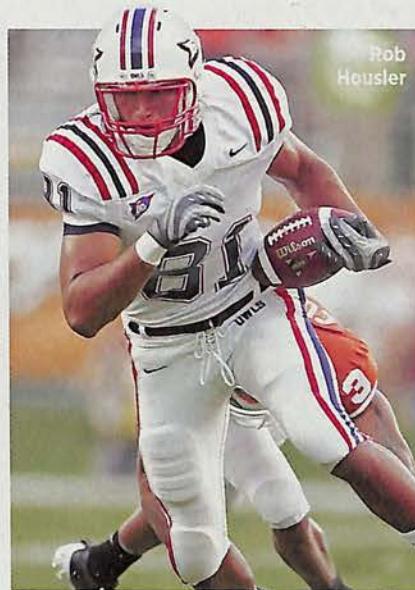
OT, Colorado. For his size (6-8, 319), he's extremely athletic. It will probably take him a year to get strong enough to block NFL rushers. Once he's settled in, you have yourself a starter for a decade.

CHRISTIAN PONDER

QB, Florida State. You need to let him sit for a while to get bigger and a little bit stronger so that he can withstand the physical rigors of the NFL. When he's healthy, he's really good.

NICK FAIRLEY

DT, Auburn. He needs to have more respect and passion for the game of football and not the things that come with football. He's got so much God-given ability. He's just going to have to learn how to be a professional.



FIVE SLEEPERS FOR 2011

EDMOND GATES

WR, Abilene Christian. He's a former high school basketball player whose football ceiling hasn't been touched in terms of growth and development. He's got incredible rare speed; he's faster than Bears receiver Johnny Knox. He's got hand-eye coordination and run-after-the-catch ability.

TAIWAN JONES

RB, Eastern Washington. He's a former defensive back who has blazing speed and is built like Chris Johnson. When he hits the corner, he's gone.

ROB HOUSLER

TE, Florida Atlantic. He's 6-5, 250. Very athletic. He has real good hands. He's one of these new-era, pass-catching tight ends. He's an athletic guy who can stretch the field and create separation.

LAWRENCE GUY

DT, Arizona State. He flashes enough explosiveness and power to become a starter in the NFL one day.

JULIUS THOMAS

TE, Portland State. A former basketball player, he has played one year of football. He has shown enough natural pass-catching skills and has enough size to at least be a backup, and he has enough athletic skills to eventually be a starter.

—As told to Dennis Dillon





DOWN ON THE RIM ... FOR NOW

By Stan McNeal

Photo by Jay Drowns / SN

The next batch of highly touted major league prospects is just about ready to burst onto the scene. *Sporting News* looked at six who could make an impact in the big leagues as early as this season.

DUSTIN ACKLEY 2B, MARINERS

Draft details: First round (second overall) by Seattle in 2009.

Reminds us of ... Diamondbacks shortstop Stephen Drew because of his smooth lefthanded swing and good athleticism.

How he'll fit: Seattle moved longtime shortstop Jack Wilson—instead of the younger Brendan Ryan—to second base with the thinking that Wilson could be traded when Ackley is ready to be promoted.

Projected debut: By the first day of summer this season.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

2010 season (Class AA, Class AAA): .267 average, .368 on-base percentage, seven homers, 51 RBIs (134 games).

Spring training 2011: .269 average, .441 on-base percentage, no homers, three RBIs (26 at-bats).

2011 season (Class AAA Tacoma): .205 average, .340 on-base percentage, two homers, two RBIs (39 at-bats).

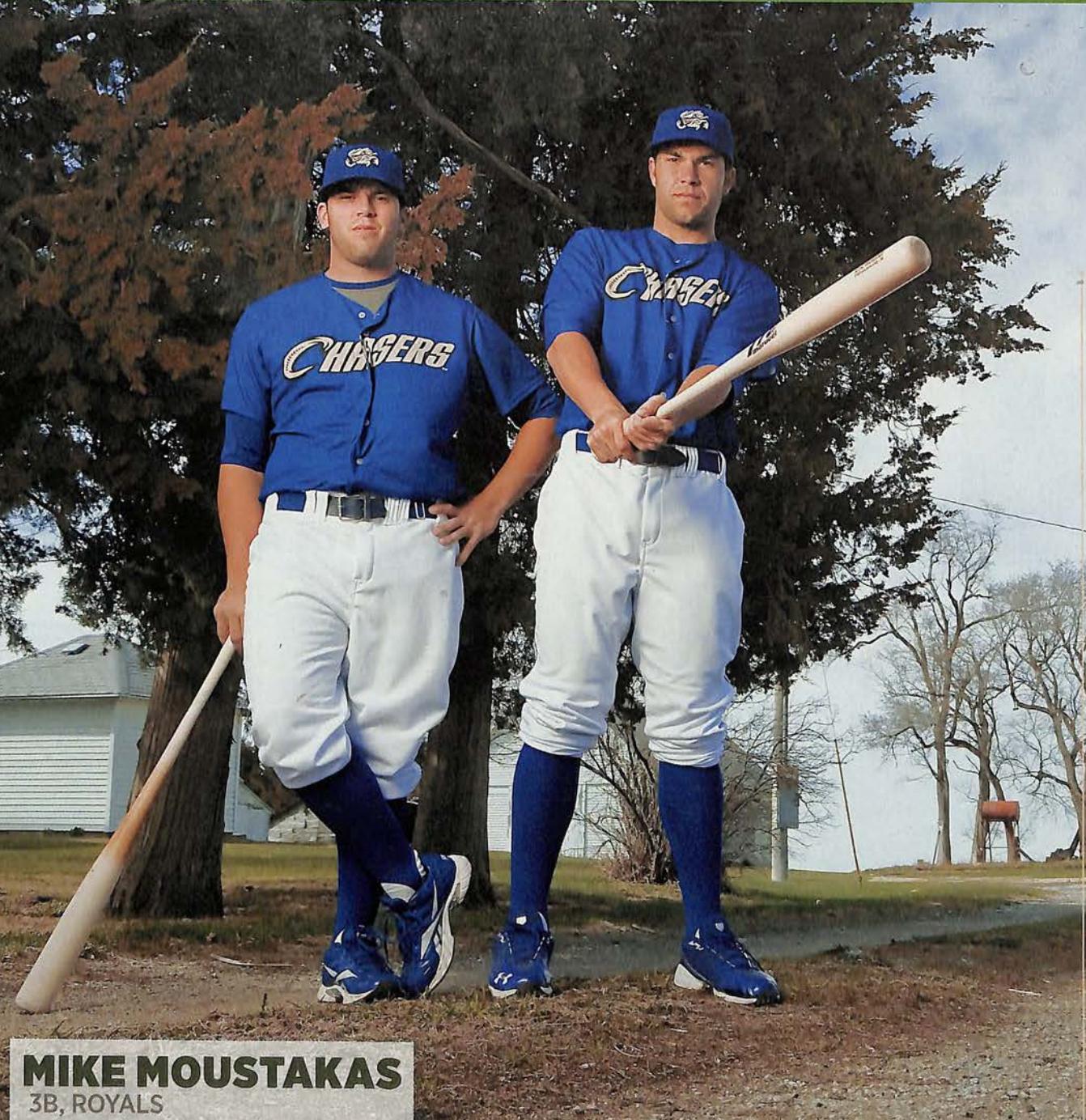
THE ORGANIZATION'S VIEW

An outfielder/first baseman in college, Ackley, 23, used spring training in 2010 to adjust to second base, a position he hadn't played before last season. "He had a really nice spring for us," general manager Jack Zduriencik says. "At the end of the day, though, the major leagues are the major leagues. He just needs to gain more experience, to learn the nuances of playing the middle infield and other parts of the game such as baserunning. When he gets here, we want him to stay here."

A SCOUT SAYS

Major league-ready: "He is a classic rhythm hitter who makes an ideal No. 3 hitter. He can spray the ball all over the field and could develop 25-homer power with maturity. He's an above-average runner and overall good athlete. Mostly, he hits."

Needs more seasoning: "From what I've seen, his defense is below-average, and I say that knowing he is learning to play a new position. He looks a little rough turning the double play, which is something he will clean up. At least he could improve there with experience."



MIKE MOUSTAKAS

3B, ROYALS

Draft details: First round (second overall) by Kansas City in 2007.
Reminds us of ... A mix of Darrell Evans and George Brett, two of the best lefthanded-hitting third basemen of the past generation.

How he'll fit: With former top prospect Alex Gordon now in left field, the Royals are using stopgaps at third base. As soon as Moustakas, 22, is deemed ready, the position will be his.

Projected debut: If Moustakas is hitting better than .320 after 40 Class AAA games, he will be promoted.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

2010 season (Class AA, Class AAA): .322 average, .369 on-base percentage, 36 homers, 124 RBIs (118 games).

Spring training 2011: .227 average, .370 on-base percentage, one homer, six RBIs (22 at-bats).

2011 season (Class AAA Omaha): .194 average, .216 on-base percentage, one homer, four RBIs (36 at-bats).

THE ORGANIZATION'S VIEW

"This was the first time Mike came to camp with a chance to compete for a big league job," assistant general manager J.J. Picollo says. "One thing we wanted to see was how he would handle all the attention, and he handled it very well. But he needed a knockout spring to make the club, and about midway through camp, he wasn't hitting as well as he's capable. We made the decision that he needed more time in Class AAA."

A SCOUT SAYS

Major league-ready: "He is a big-time hitter with bat speed and raw power that already are better than major league-average. Because he has dealt with some adversity in the minors, and overcome it, he could be more prepared to handle the ups and downs of the major leagues."

Needs more seasoning: "His defense is never going to be better than OK because he doesn't have a lot of range or soft hands. As a hitter, he was more anxious in spring training than I would have liked to see."

ERIC HOSMER

1B, ROYALS

Draft details: First round (third overall) by Kansas City in 2008.

Reminds us of ... Former major league first baseman Wally Joyner, but with more size (6-4, 230).

How he'll fit: Not easily. The Royals are set at first base and DH with Billy Butler, their best hitter, and Kila Ka'aihue, their best power hitter. Neither can play the outfield. Hosmer is taking fly balls in the outfield, but logic says Kansas City would prefer its best defensive first baseman, Hosmer, to play first base.

Projected debut: Barring an injury or prolonged slump, the Butler-Ka'aihue roadblock should keep Hosmer in the minors until September.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

2010 season (Class AA, Class AAA): .338 average, .406 on-base percentage, 20 homers, 86 RBIs (137 games).

Spring training 2011: .450 average, .520 on-base percentage, two homers, eight RBIs (20 at-bats).

2011 season (Class AAA Omaha): .368 average, .415 on-base percentage, one homer, four RBIs (38 at-bats).

THE ORGANIZATION'S VIEW

Although his chances of making the Royals out of spring training were slim, Hosmer, 21, flourished. "He was outstanding," assistant general manager J.J. Picollo says. "We left camp thinking that maybe he's closer than we had anticipated coming in. There is no reason to rush him and we aren't going to, but his time frame has moved up."

A SCOUT SAYS

Major league-ready: "He has a smooth swing and has shown good plate discipline in the minors. I think he will hit with more power than Mike Moustakas, though not many agree with me. Defensively, he's there. His range is good enough that he can play way off the base, and he has the hands to catch everything."

Needs more seasoning: "We haven't seen how he handles really good pitching. At Class AAA, he'll be facing more experienced pitchers who can throw breaking pitches in fastball counts and fastballs in breaking ball counts. Let's see how he makes adjustments to that."

Photo by Michael Kleveter for SN



Photo by Stephen B. Thornton for SN

MIKE TROUT CF, ANGELS

Draft details: First round (25th overall) by Los Angeles in 2009.

Reminds us of ... Indians center fielder Grady Sizemore, with more speed and bat control but not quite as much power.

How he'll fit: Left fielder Vernon Wells is signed through 2014, right fielder Torii Hunter through 2012. And if center fielder Peter Bourjos, 24, lives up to expectations, the Angels will need to make a deal to create room for Trout.

Projected debut: A strong performance could lead to a Class AAA promotion by early this summer. Reaching the majors this season is unlikely, though with his talent, it is possible.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

2010 season (Class A, high Class A): .341 average, .428 on-base percentage, 10 homers, 58 RBIs (131 games).

Spring training 2011: .276 average, .364 on-base percentage, no homers, one RBI (29 at-bats).

2011 season (Class AA Arkansas): .303 average, .425 on-base percentage, three homers, eight RBIs (33 at-bats).

THE ORGANIZATION'S VIEW

Trout, 19, was in camp this spring to get a taste of major league pitching. He impressed everyone but surprised no one. "He showed a very unique tool set and some makeup, a lot of intangibles," says Abe Flores, the Angels' director of player development. "He has not failed, and we do not want him to fail. If he does, I'd rather it be in the minors."

A SCOUT SAYS

Major league-ready: "He has all kinds of strengths. Top-of-the-scale runner, high contact hitter with very good strike zone discipline. You can see the power in batting practice. How it translates into games will evolve. And he has all the intangibles, just wants to win."

Needs more seasoning: "As fast as he is, he needs to improve his basestealing. He could be more aggressive. His arm in center field continues to improve, but he gets to balls so quickly that he cuts off runners."

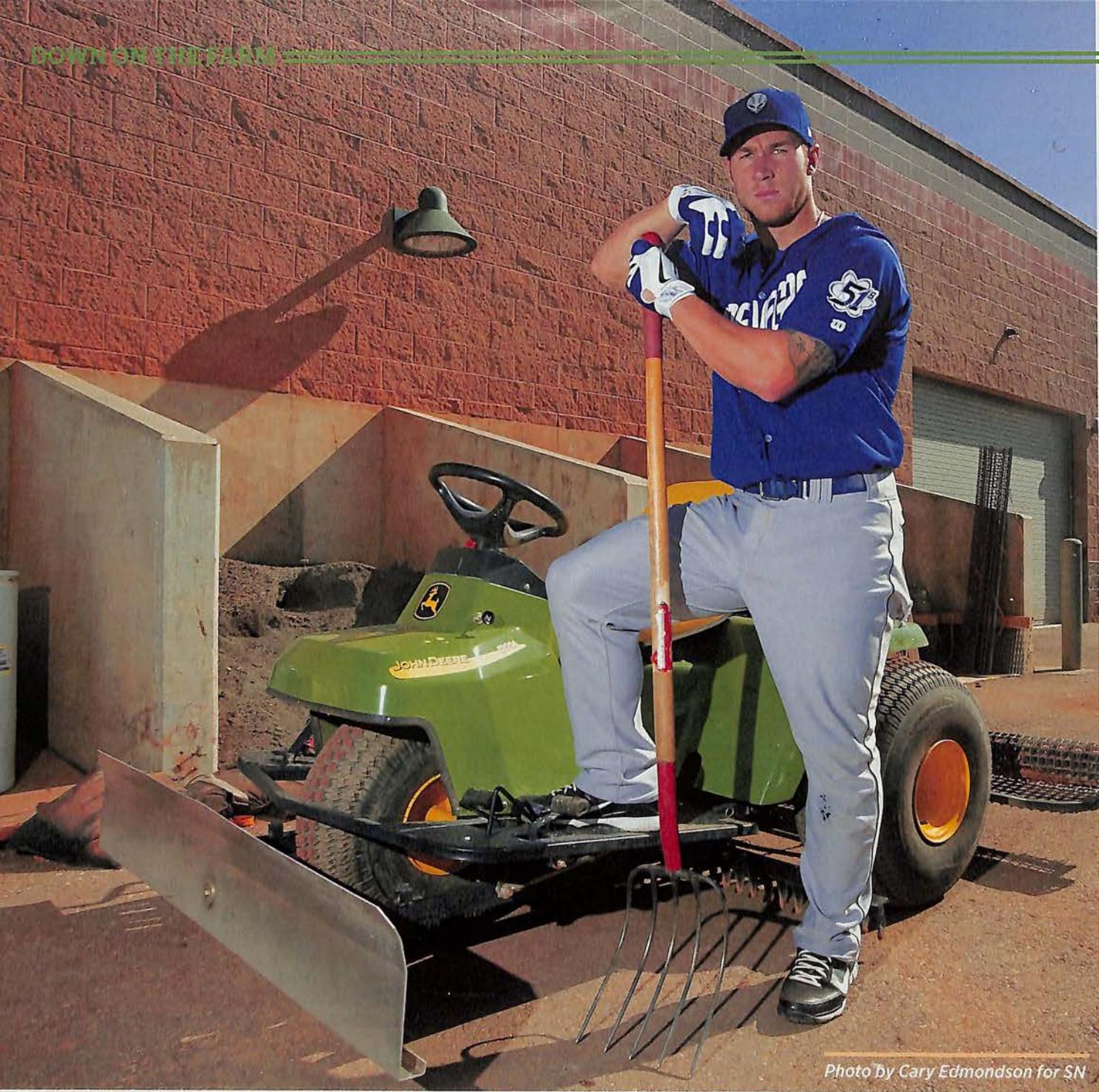


Photo by Cary Edmondson for SN

BRETT LAWRIE

3B, BLUE JAYS

Draft details: First round (16th overall) by Milwaukee in 2008.

Reminds us of ... A slightly lesser version of Hall of Famer Ryne Sandberg, who began his major league career at third base before moving to second.

How he'll fit: The Blue Jays like third baseman Edwin Encarnacion's power potential, but no one on the club will hit more than Lawrie. When Lawrie is called up, Encarnacion will move to DH and DH Juan Rivera will go to the bench.

Projected debut: Lawrie could be in Toronto as early as May.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

2010 season (Class AA): .285 average, .346 on-base percentage, eight homers, 63 RBIs, 30 stolen bases (135 games).

Spring training 2011: .293 average, .326 on-base percentage, two homers, six RBIs, three stolen bases (41 at-bats).

2011 season (Class AAA Las Vegas): .442 average, .500 on-base percentage, one homer, six RBIs, two stolen bases (43 at-bats).

THE ORGANIZATION'S VIEW

Lawrie impressed Toronto with his hitting and his play at third base before being reassigned with about a week left in spring training. "We've got an exciting young player," manager John Farrell says. "What he did is affect our view of

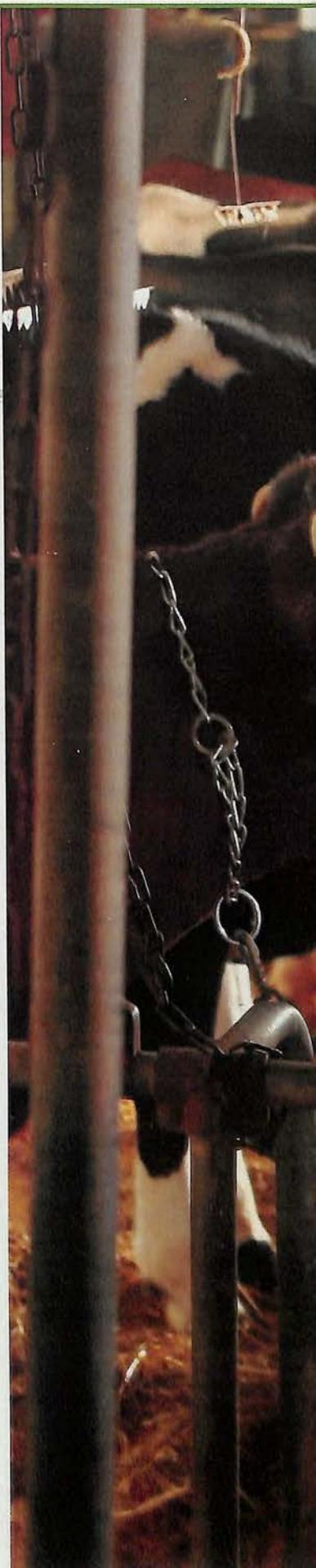
his timeline. We don't know the date (of his MLB debut), but it might be shorter than what we first anticipated."

A SCOUT SAYS

Major league-ready: "The term is *hitterish*.

Translation: He's the kind of guy who squares up two to three balls a game. He goes to the plate with bad intentions, like he is going to hurt the ball. Very, very aggressive player with a strong body."

Needs more seasoning: "He was moved to third (base) because they don't think he can play up the middle. He can hold his own at third, but he doesn't have strong fielding instincts or the softest hands. There also are questions about his makeup, that he's not the best teammate, and has been known to be arrogant."





MANNY BANUELOS

SP, YANKEES

Draft details: Signed as a free agent out of Mexico in 2008.

Reminds us of ... Former Yankee starter Ron Guidry, another hard-throwing lefthander who pitched at 5-11, 161 pounds (Banuelos is listed at 5-11, 155).

How he'll fit: Banuelos projects as the Yankees' No. 2 starter behind CC Sabathia. He should have a chance to pitch his way into the rotation next spring.

Projected debut: Unless New York decides to bring him up as a reliever, Banuelos will need a big season at Class AA to arrive in September.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

2010 season (rookie league, Class A, Class AA): 0-4, 2.51 ERA, 85 strikeouts in 64½ innings (15 starts).

Spring training 2011: 2.13 ERA, 14 strikeouts in 12½ innings (six games).

2011 season (Class AA Trenton): 0-0, 0.00 ERA, one strikeout in four innings (one start).

THE ORGANIZATION'S VIEW

The day after he turned 20, Banuelos made a nationally televised spring training start against the Red Sox. He allowed five baserunners but didn't surrender a run in 2½ innings. "That's a sign of maturity," Yankees manager Joe Girardi says. "He got himself in a little bit of trouble, but he made pitches when he had to. That's a real good sign."

A SCOUT SAYS

Major league-ready: "He has a lot of weapons, and he knows how to use them—a fastball up to 97 mph, a changeup that he used to strike out big league hitters in spring training and excellent command. He shows a veteran's poise, too—impressive since he's only 20."

Needs more seasoning: "My only concern is how he will hold up as a small-bodied lefty who throws hard. His delivery is clean, but you don't find too many at his size that can hold up for 200 innings consistently."

Photo by Jay Drowns / SN • Smiling Hill Farm



GROUP SHOTS

SOME OF THE NATION'S BEST PROGRAMS HAVE MULTIPLE TOP PROSPECTS SIGNED FOR NEXT SEASON—MANY OF WHOM SHOWED THEY'RE ALREADY READY FOR LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION AT THE RECENT JORDAN BRAND CLASSIC

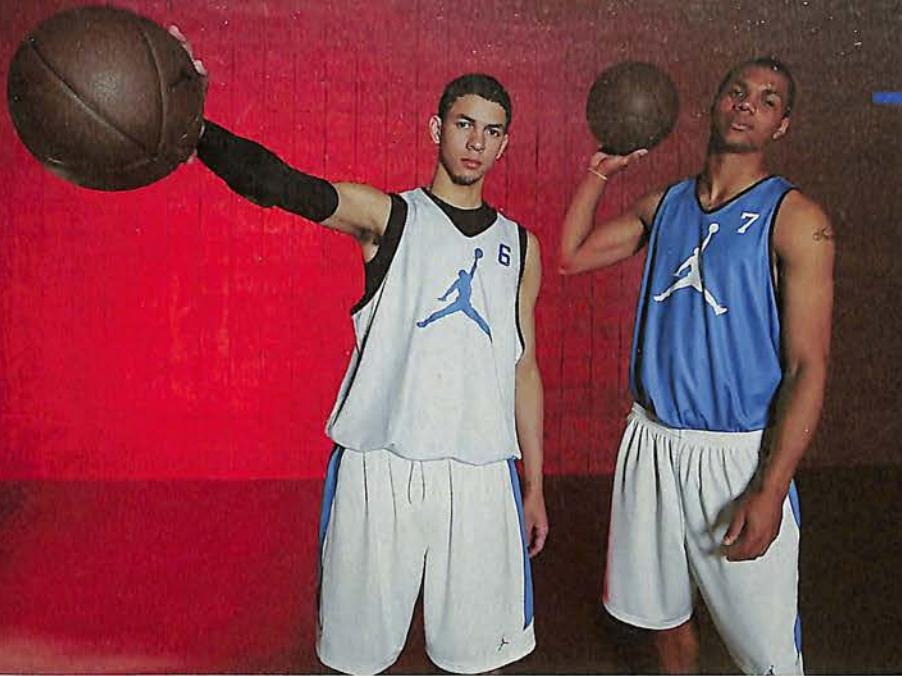
Photos by Albert Dickson / SN

KENTUCKY

SF MICHAEL GILCHRIST, PF ANTHONY DAVIS, PF KYLE WILTJER, PG MARQUIS TEAGUE

Kentucky coach John Calipari has staked his claim as one of college basketball's best recruiters, and his star-studded 2011 class only boosts that reputation. Four future Wildcats were named to the Jordan Brand All-American squad—point guard Marquis Teague is as quick as anyone in the country, and bigs Michael Gilchrist, Anthony Davis and Kyle Wiltjer will fortify a front line that was severely lacking in depth last season. Kentucky fans traveled well—as always—during the Wildcats' unexpected NCAA Tournament run this spring. This group of top 25 recruits couldn't, but they reveled in the excitement even though they weren't able to attend the Final Four-clinching win against North Carolina.

TEAGUE SAYS: "We were all together, watching it at the McDonald's game. We were all downstairs in the lobby watching Kentucky. We were there talking with James (McAdoo) when they were playing his North Carolina team. That was crazy. Lot of fun. That made us think we've got to get back there next year and win it all. I really wanted them to win it this year. I was happy to see them get that far. We talk all the time about next year. We're real excited; we're all ready to get down there. We're talking about getting down there in June and working out."



DUKE

SG AUSTIN RIVERS, SF MIKE GBINIJE

Shots are available this fall at Cameron Indoor Stadium. Nolan Smith and Kyle Singler are seniors, and freshman point guard Kyrie Irving is heading to the NBA. Good thing coach Mike Krzyzewski has another stellar recruiting class lined up, headlined by Jordan Brand All-Americans Austin Rivers and Mike Gbinije, and two more elite players in Quinn Cook and Marshall Plumlee. Once they finally step on the court, they'll be able to let their play speak for itself, as opposed to only talking about what they expect to accomplish at Duke next season.

RIVERS SAYS: "Each player defends their school, says, 'Oh, my college is gonna be better than yours next year,' or whatever everybody talks about here. But it's fun. Me, Marshall, Quinn and Mike will all defend our college. And we have a lot of bragging rights for Duke, so it's not too hard to brag about Duke with all the stuff Coach K and all those people have already done there. We look forward to playing with each other. They're great guys and real easy to play with. I'm very excited."

NORTH CAROLINA

PF JAMES MCADOO, SG P.J. HAIRSTON

Nothing wrong with a little friendly rivalry among elite recruits, right? Of the 22 players in the Jordan Brand All-American game, only three signed with schools that missed the NCAA Tournament this season. And when you sign with a tradition-rich school like North Carolina—"When they first started recruiting me, I was like, 'This is the college Michael Jordan went to,'" P.J. Hairston says—you can't help but get involved in a little chatter. Hairston is a rugged shooting guard with size (6-6) and range, and future teammate James McAdoo is a 6-8 forward who will fit right in with Carolina bigs Tyler Zeller and John Henson.

HAIRSTON SAYS: "We play around with the rivalries. I'm pretty sure everybody here will have a good or great career in college. Everyone's like, 'Oh, we'll meet you next year,' or 'Can't wait to meet you in the NCAA Tournament next year,' or 'We'll meet you in New Orleans for the Final Four' or something like that. (McAdoo and I) talk about next year, but we don't talk about it a lot. We just want to get there. The more we talk about it, the slower it goes, so we just try to ease by and just let it come to us. Don't get us wrong, though. We're real ready for it. Any challenge we get, we'll be ready for it."



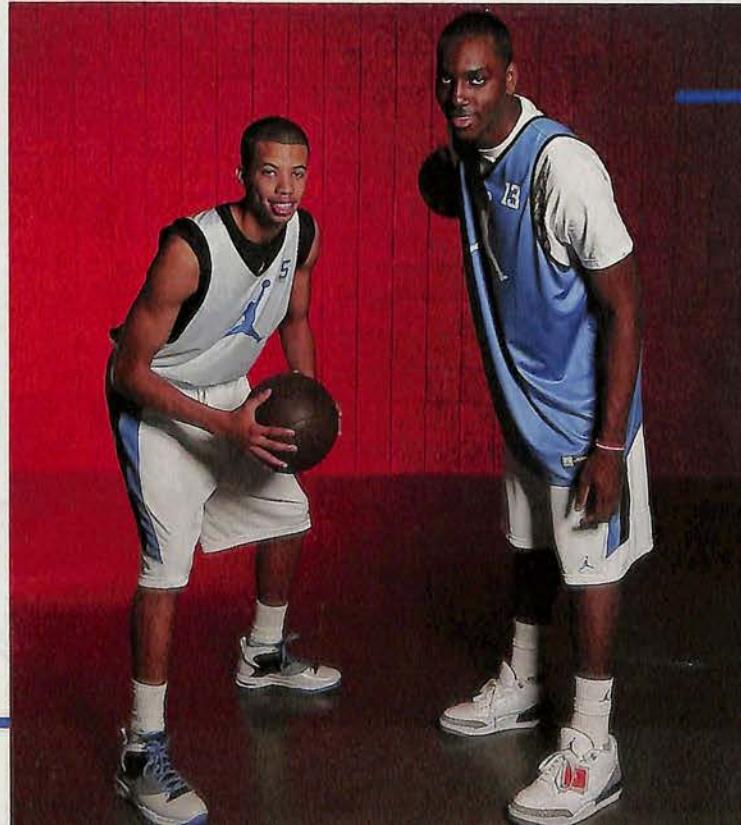
SYRACUSE

SG MICHAEL CARTER-WILLIAMS, C RAKEEM CHRISTMAS

The days when freshman players met their teammates for the first time at practice are long gone. Future Syracuse teammates Michael Carter-Williams—a 6-5 scorer who can handle the basketball well—and Rakeem Christmas—a 6-9 post presence—have been roommates at several of these types of events. Not only does that help with establishing an off-court friendship, but it gives them extra time to discuss the intricacies of coach Jim Boeheim's famed 2-3 zone.

CARTER-WILLIAMS SAYS: "We hear it all the time, 'Oh, you're just going to Syracuse to play zone so you don't have to play any defense.' But if you actually watch and break down the defense, it's man-to-man principles but we're just in a 2-3 zone. You can't let your man go by you. We're excited for it. We've been trying to learn the system already and get ahead. We room together everywhere we go, which is a good experience, and we talk about the future and what we're looking for and our goals for the future. We're roommates here, were roommates at the McDonald's game. I guess they just put us together because we're going to Syracuse, which works."

—Ryan Fagan



These are lifelong relationships you build'

Texas signee **MYCK KABONGO**, a point guard from Toronto, and other high school All-Americans made the trip to Charlotte to play in the Jordan Brand Classic in mid-April. Kabongo talked with *Sporting News* about some of the places he went and people he met during the event-filled trip.

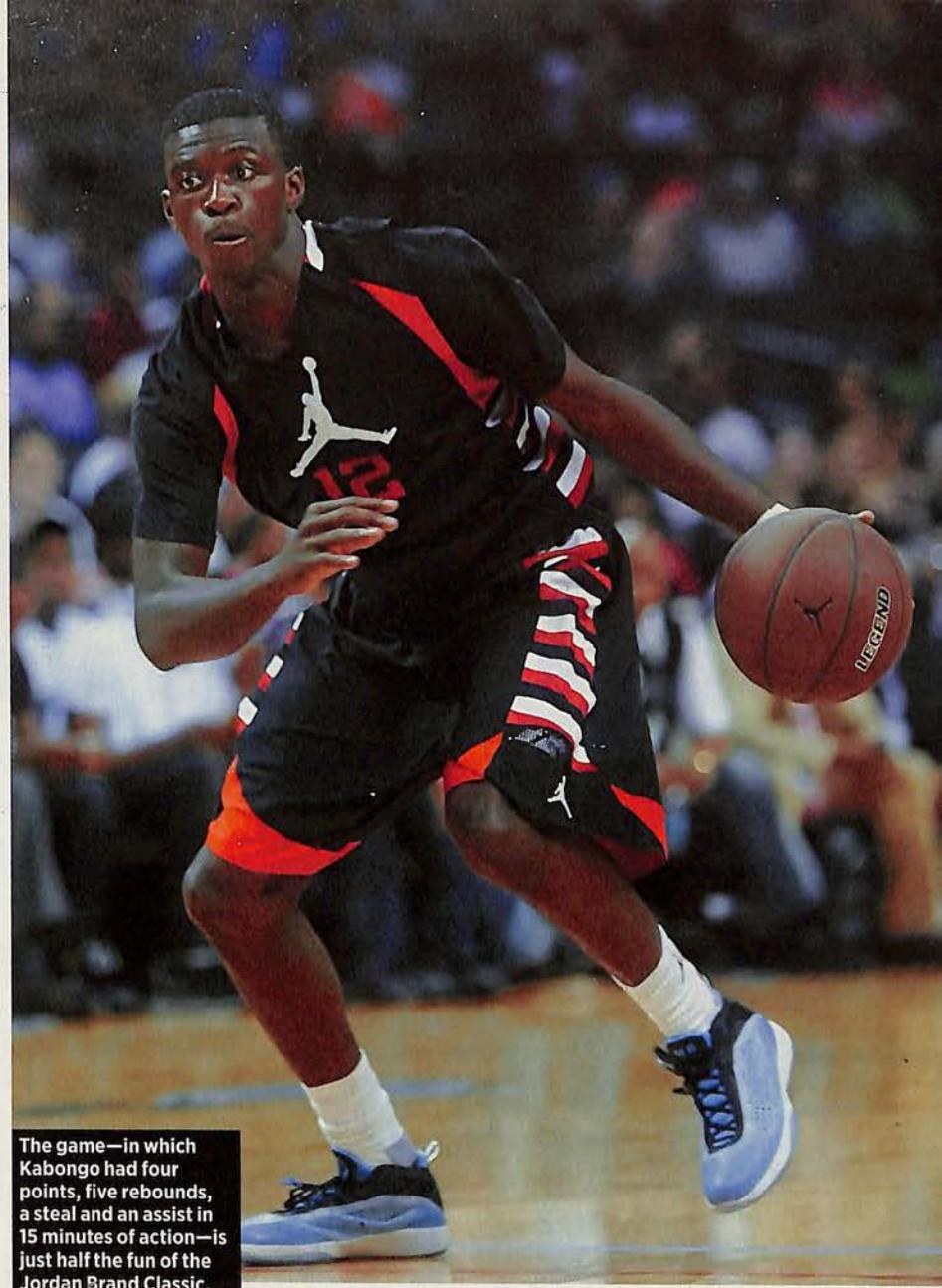
The experience we had was just so much fun. Whenever you're in settings like this, you've got to be thankful for it, and I'm so thankful to be here. We got to go to Joe Gibbs Racing, got to go bowling, and meeting new people is always fun to me.

Those racecars are made for someone to fit a certain size. I'm 6-foot-2, and I have a skinny frame, so I got in, but getting out was so hard. I was stuck. It was so much fun, though. The chance to experience NASCAR and drive with someone like Denny Hamlin ... he's a great person, and I put my life in his hands, and he took care of me. It was crazy when he was doing those burnouts. I'm not going to lie—I was a little dizzy, but it was great. Just being in the car with him—not too many people can say they were in the car with him. That sport is unbelievable.

Visiting the children's hospital was great. It makes you appreciate life so much because you forget the little things. And whenever you go to a place like that, it makes you see how blessed you are. I mean, we're complaining, "These shoes don't fit me right," while other people are having so many different problems. You pray for stuff like that. I'm a strong believer in God, and I always keep people like that in my prayers.

The atmosphere at the game was crazy. Getting to play in an NBA gym like Time Warner Cable Arena, that's where you want to be one day. Me and Austin Rivers and Anthony Davis have been great friends, and Quincy Miller, too. These are lifelong relationships you build with some of these guys at these events. It's going to be fun down the road to see how our futures go.

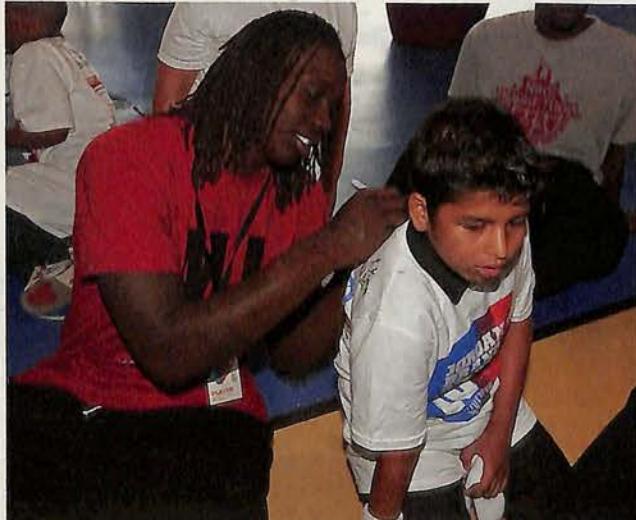
—As told to Ryan Fagan



The game—in which Kabongo had four points, five rebounds, a steal and an assist in 15 minutes of action—is just half the fun of the Jordan Brand Classic.

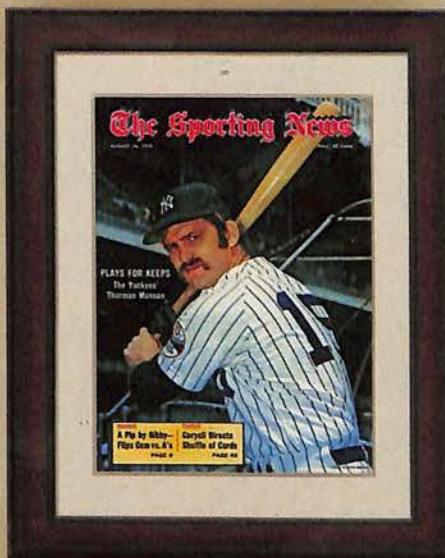
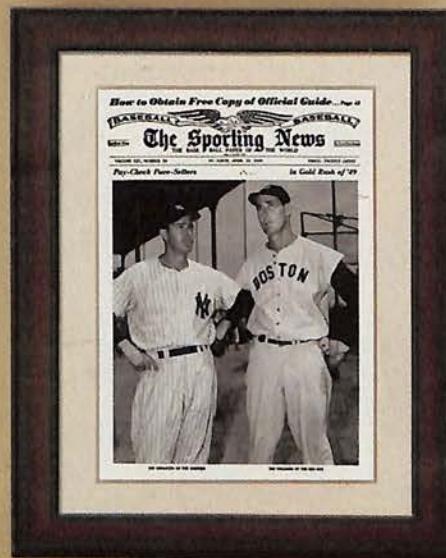


Hamlin wowed Kabongo during a tour of Joe Gibbs Racing—first with the lack of doors on a stock car and then with a ride.



The trip wasn't all about goofing around—the participants, including LSU signee Johnny O'Bryant (left) and Washington-bound Tony Wroten, visited patients at Presbyterian Hemby Children's Hospital, then spent time at the facility with students visiting from an area elementary school.

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PAGE **54**

A jack-of-all-trades—
at least on the infield

On April 5, when Michael Young played first base for the first time in his career against the Mariners, it was a reminder why the Rangers didn't trade him in the offseason.

He has played every infield position at some point in his 12 years with Texas—but never all during the same season. That could happen in 2011, though the plan calls for him to be the club's primary DH.

Young's games played by season:

YEAR	1B	2B	SS	3B	DH
2011	2	3	0	0	9
2010	0	0	0	155	2
2009	0	0	0	134	1
2008	0	0	151	0	3
2007	0	0	150	0	6
2006	0	0	155	0	7
2005	0	0	155	0	4
2004	0	0	158	0	2
2003	0	159	7	0	0
2002	0	152	11	4	0
2001	0	104	0	0	0
2000	0	1	0	0	0
TOTALS	2	419	787	293	34

INSIDE:

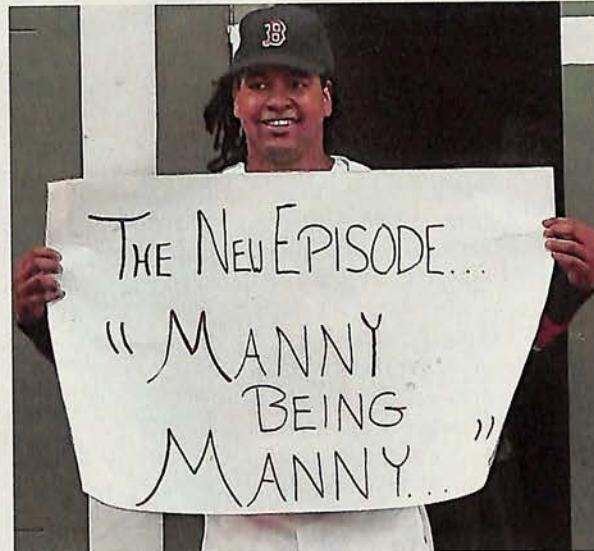
► Pg. 53 MLB ► Pg. 56 NBA ► Pg. 57 NHL ► Pg. 58 NASCAR ► Pg. 60 COLLEGE FOOTBALL ► Pg. 62 SOCCER ► Pg. 64 NFL ► Pg. 65 COLLEGE BASKETBALL

THE HOT CORNER

Never known for his hustle, Manny sure made a quick exit

► Manny Ramirez always knew he'd run from a 100-game suspension if caught again for using performance-enhancing drugs. It's safe to believe his thought process was this: *I'm not hitting anymore. I'll get back on it. If I get caught, I'm rich. I'll just retire.* Whom do we hate more: The guy who lies about using PEDs or the guy who uses, gets caught and disappears to Spain as if he doesn't care?

► When "breaking news" flashed across clubhouse televisions on April 13, players took breaks from their workouts and card games to see what conviction(s) Barry Bonds would face. That included Cubs center fielder Marlon Byrd, the only major leaguer who still works out with BALCO founder Victor Conte. The first question asked in the Cubs' clubhouse after Bonds was convicted of obstruction of justice: "Will he go to jail?"

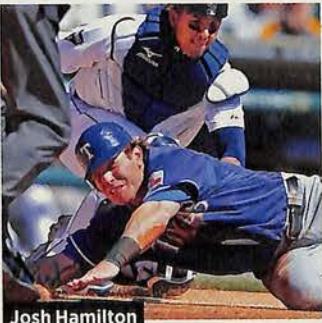


► Josh Hamilton's publicly calling his third base coach's decision to send him home on a foul popup stupid was dumb in itself. Hamilton could have simply disobeyed and,

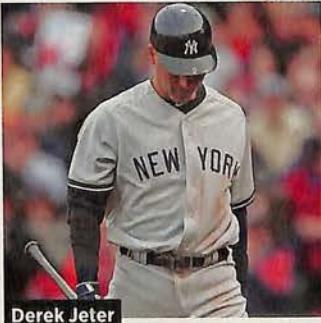
Ramirez didn't want a rerun of a suspension that would've been much longer than the original.



Barry Bonds



Josh Hamilton



Derek Jeter

thus, prevented the subsequent fractured arm that is expected to sideline him for 6-8 weeks. Still, in the first inning and with the middle of the Rangers' lineup hitting, even a tee ball coach knows better than to try to turn a popup into a sacrifice fly.

► Yankees manager Joe Girardi said he wanted to give Derek Jeter 100 at-bats before assessing him, but Jeter's knee-jerk decision to abandon the adjustments he made to his swing was a clear indication that he didn't need that much time to know something was wrong.

► With the Brewers expected to contend in the N.L. Central and ace Zack Greinke expected to join the rotation soon, the baseball world will discover how uncomfortable and awkward a Greinke interview can be.

► Given Jered Weaver's 15-strikeout performance and Dan Haren's 1-hit shutout in the season's first two weeks, it appears Ervin Santana was on to something when he said the Angels' rotation is "better than anyone," including Philadelphia's.

► If Marlins ace Josh Johnson played for the Yankees, Red Sox or Phillies, he'd be a household name by now.

► The Red Sox won't make the playoffs. Neither will the surprisingly successful Indians or Royals.



ANTHONY WITRADO

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The Marlins uniform is great camouflage, but Josh Johnson won't be able to hide from stardom much longer

Now that's more like it

After career years in 2009, expectations were sky-high last season for Brewers slugger Prince Fielder, Dodgers budding star Matt Kemp and Giants free swinger Pablo Sandoval. All were disappointing in 2010 but have rebounded early in 2011:

PRINCE FIELDER, 1B, BREWERS

2009: Fielder hit 46 homers, drove in a league-leading 141 runs and set career highs with a .299 batting average and a 1.014 OPS. He made his second All-Star team.

2010: He experienced an across-the-board drop in production, hitting .261 with 32 homers, 83 RBIs and a .871 OPS in just five fewer plate appearances than '09. "It was frustrating for me," Fielder says. "I think I got to pressing after starting so slow and I never recovered."

2011: In his first 13 games, Fielder hit .340 with three homers, 15 RBIs and a 1.043 OPS.

MATT KEMP, CF, DODGERS

2009: His breakout effort included a Gold Glove, a Silver Slugger award, a .297 average, 101 RBIs, a second consecutive 30-plus-steal season and a top 10 finish in N.L. MVP voting.

2010: Kemp's effort, focus and desire all were questioned publicly. Despite a career-best 28 homers, Kemp was successful in only 19 of 34 stolen base attempts, his batting average plummeted to .249 and his total of five errors was third-most among all center fielders.

2011: Kemp leads the N.L. with a .453 batting average and the majors with eight stolen bases.

PABLO SANDOVAL, 3B, GIANTS

2009: He endeared himself to Giants fans by hitting .330 with 25 homers and 90 RBIs in his first full major league season.

2010: Sandoval's weight ballooned, and he finished with a .268-13-63 line. He hit into an N.L.-high 26 double plays, and his lack of discipline resulted in a .323 on-base percentage (a 54-point decline from '09).

2011: A trimmer, more motivated Sandoval hit .347 with a .385 on-base percentage and nine RBIs in his first 14 games.

— Anthony Witrado

Tricks of the transition: A former reliever details his move to the rotation



By going from the bullpen to the rotation—a result of Adam Wainwright's season-ending elbow injury—Cardinals righthander **Kyle McClellan** hopes to double his innings and reduce his outings by more than half. Changing roles after three seasons as a reliever has affected more than his workload, the 26-year-old St. Louis native told *Sporting News*.

I wasn't a reliever who would come in and blow the ball by guys. I relied on location and movement and using my four pitches. One reason I kept using all my pitches was because I always had in the back of my mind that I wanted to start.

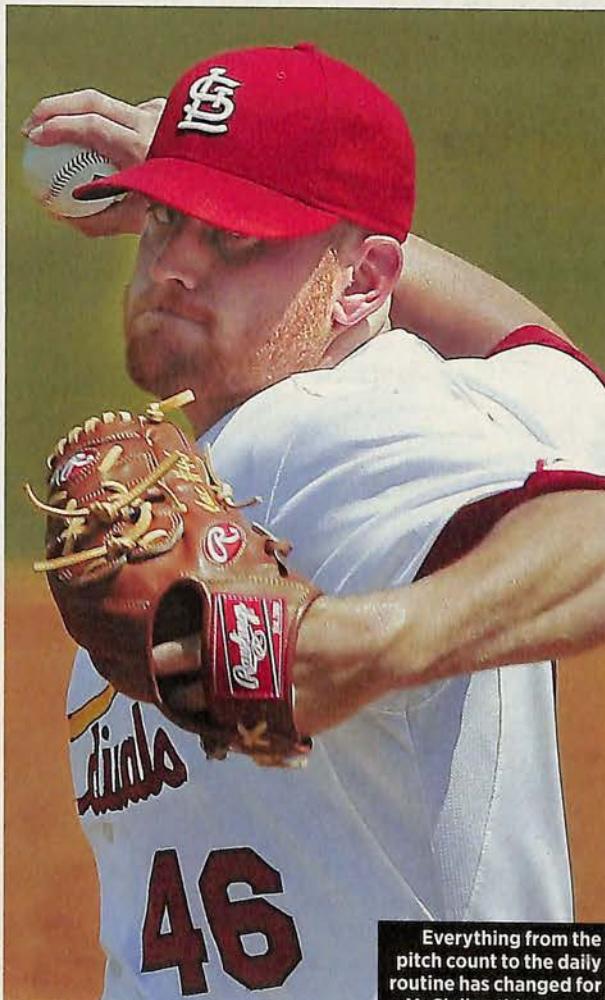
For the first three innings of my first start against the Pirates, I felt strong. When I started to tire, my velocity went down, but I had better control of my body and was able to keep the ball down better. Every time I got two strikes on a hitter out of the bullpen, I went to my curveball. As a starter, I haven't used it as much as I thought I would. I've gotten strikeouts on my fastball, changeup

and slider. It's more about pitching. I can't throw everything I've got at you in one at-bat because I'm going to see you again. My goal is to go seven innings. A starting pitcher needs to pitch that long to turn the game over to your setup guy and closer. I know firsthand what happens when you don't.

On the drive to the ballpark before my first start, I found myself going over the at-bat with Jose Tabata, their leadoff hitter. In past years, it was about the team we were facing and what pitches would be important for me that night. Now my job for four days is to prepare for that one day. I had my routine down in the bullpen and would do the same thing every day to be ready to pitch that day. Now it's completely different. I'm rushing to get to the ballpark because there's a lot more stuff to do.

I haven't found myself accidentally heading out to the bullpen, but in my first start I almost went out of the stretch with no one on base. I fell behind 2-0 in the count, rubbed up the ball, walked around the mound and was about ready to step on from the stretch. But I caught myself in time.

—As told to Stan McNeal



Everything from the pitch count to the daily routine has changed for McClellan this season.

TEMPORARY HOUSING?

Two other relievers-turned-starters whose rotation stays might not last long:

LHP Phil Coke, Tigers. Figuring it would have two rotation openings this season, Detroit decided in 2010 to make Coke a starter for 2011. But when the Tigers promote prospect Andy Oliver—which might be soon—Coke could return to the bullpen.

RHP Alexi Ogando, Rangers. Considered a potential closer if Neftali Feliz had joined the rotation, Ogando was the Rangers' reliever to change roles. Once Tommy Hunter (groin) or Brandon Webb (shoulder) is healthy, Ogando could return to a setup role.

—Stan McNeal



Men of multiple gloves

As is the case with pitchers, position players' versatility is a valuable asset. One of baseball's basic principles is if you hit, you play. Sometimes, however, that results in a position change that sacrifices defense. Among this season's notable position player relocations:

LANCE BERKMAN, CARDINALS First base to right field

On the heels of Berkman's worst offensive season, St. Louis still valued his bat—so much so that it was willing to put Berkman (and his surgically repaired knee) in the outfield on a regular basis for the first time since 2004. "I'm

not worried about my defense as much as a lot of others seem to be," Berkman says. "If they hit me the ball, I'm going to make the play."

MICHAEL YOUNG, RANGERS Third base to DH/utility

When Texas signed third baseman Adrian Beltre, it forced Young to change positions for the third time since 2004. And it resulted in a trade request. Still a Ranger, however, Young should play all four infield positions. His favorite? "Baseball player," he says, diplomatically.

KEVIN YOUNKILIS, RED SOX First base to third base

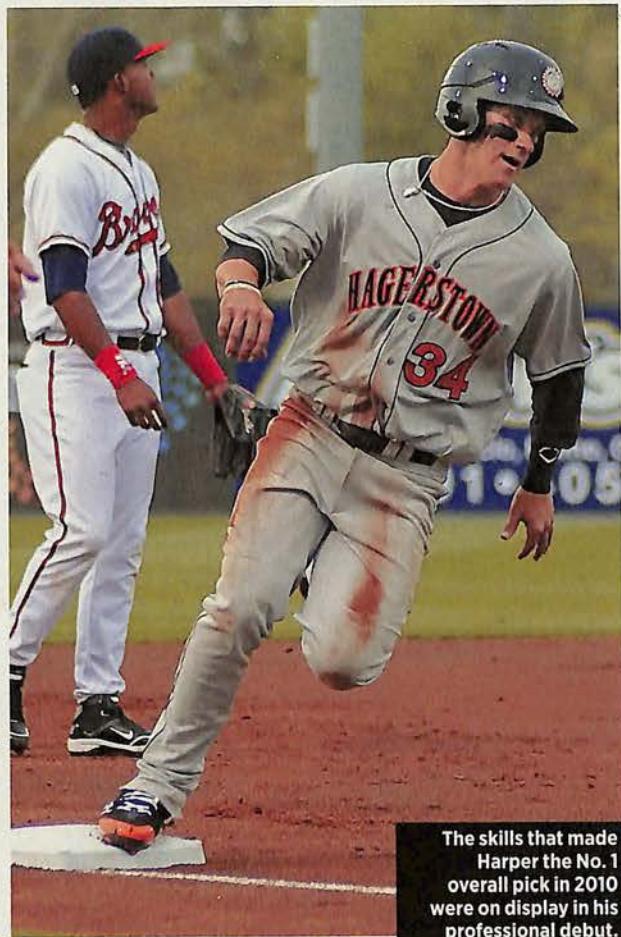
He is back at his favorite position after four-plus seasons—and one Gold Glove—as

Boston's primary first baseman. "We wouldn't be able to get Adrian Gonzalez without Youk," manager Terry Francona says. With both, the Red Sox have one of the game's top two corner combos.

JACK WILSON, MARINERS Shortstop to second base

Though Wilson has been one of baseball's slickest shortstops for the past 10 years, Seattle decided to move him—rather than shortstop Brendan Ryan—when second base prospect Dustin Ackley was sent to Class AAA late in spring training. Wilson has handled a difficult situation like a pro in the clubhouse but has had his problems on the field.

—Stan McNeal



The skills that made Harper the No. 1 overall pick in 2010 were on display in his professional debut.

Another Nationals treasure begins his journey to the majors

By Ryan Fagan
rfagan@sportingnews.com

Bryce Harper, the No. 1 overall pick in the 2010 draft by the Nationals, made his professional debut for low-Class A Hagerstown (Md.) in the South Atlantic League on April 7. He made an immediate impact, going 2-for-4 with an RBI and a stolen base. "He has all the tools, and he showed them all tonight," manager Brian Daubach said afterward.

A sampling of those tools:

Power: During batting practice, Harper, 18, mashed three balls over Home Run Hill, beyond the right field fence at State Mutual Stadium in Rome, Ga. Word among the grounds crew was that only Braves catcher Brian McCann, while with Rome in 2003, has hit one farther.

Bat control: On the seventh pitch of his first at-bat, Harper was momentarily fooled by an

offspeed offering but adjusted his swing and knocked a soft liner into center field for an RBI single.

Speed: After that single, Harper easily stole second base. "He's going to steal some bases, even at the major league level," Daubach says. "He's a plus runner."

Defense: In pursuit of a line drive into the gap in right-center, Harper, a converted catcher, sprinted over, cut off the ball before it reached the wall and launched a frozen rope to second base. "He's showing an outstanding arm in the outfield," Daubach says.

Situational awareness: In his second at-bat, Harper was up with a runner on first base and one out. He noticed the third baseman playing deep and off the bag, so he dropped a perfectly

placed bunt—one that wasn't signaled from the bench—down the third base line. "If I can lay one down and get on base, get a runner over, I think that's huge," Harper says. "It helps us out, and that's all that matters.... I was like, 'OK, if they want to throw that (alignment) at me, I'll throw this one at them.'"

Of course, there's still work to be done. Harper was caught stealing when he took off for second base too early. And in his third at-bat of the game, he struck out, waving at a fastball just off the plate. But that's what the minors are for, to work on the little things. "There's a reason he was the first pick overall," Daubach says. "He has all the skills, and when he can harness those, he's going to be an outstanding player."

Mound of trouble: The Twins aren't pitching up to expectations

The Twins have become the blueprint for small-market success. Since the 2002 season, they have made six trips to the postseason, thanks in part to the success of their farm system, their ability to manufacture runs, their devotion to fundamentals and the efficiency of their pitching staff.

But they're off to a slow start in 2011, and it is their pitchers'

inefficiency that stands out among the team's deficiencies. From 2003-10, Twins pitchers were the stingiest in the majors in walks (3,212) and pitches per inning (15.7). The "throw strikes" mantra is stressed by the coaching staffs in all levels of the organization and is embraced by Twins pitchers.

However, this season's Twins are 21st in team ERA (4.61)

partially because they rank in the bottom third of two of the categories they have dominated for most of this century.

One explanation: the turnover in the bullpen. The Twins lost five key relievers in free agency. This season's relievers are averaging 17.6 pitches per inning, the relief corps' highest mark in more than a decade and a jump of

more than a pitch per inning from 2010. However, the starters deserve their share of the blame. From 2003 to 2010, the Twins' rotation averaged more than 15.7 pitches per inning only once. This season, that number is 15.9. And the starting five has experienced no turnover from 2010.

—Chris Bahr
Stats courtesy of Stats Inc.

CHARTING THEIR FALL

THE TWINS' RANKS IN WALKS AND PITCHES PER INNING HAVE DROPPED DRAMATICALLY IN 2011



Francisco Liriano



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Stability and wisdom don't play well with the Knicks.

IN THE PAINT

Van Gundy can protest all he wants—the way teams play Howard isn't changing

Back in March, Magic coach Stan Van Gundy drew the ire of commissioner David Stern after one of his (many) rants on how star center Dwight Howard is officiated. Van Gundy had a good point—teams that are physical with Howard almost never get called for flagrant fouls—but he probably stepped over the line when he said, "I certainly can't have an opinion because David Stern, like a lot of leaders we've seen in this world lately, don't really tolerate other people's opinion or free speech or anything. So I'm not really allowed to have an opinion."

The frequent complaints out of Orlando were supposed to help Howard. By raising the issue to the media, Van Gundy hoped to sway officials into giving Howard more calls. But there really hasn't been any change, and that should become only more obvious in the postseason. "Every team in the league has a game plan for Howard that calls for trying to rough him up, going at him, making the refs make calls," one Eastern Conference scout says. "It's the way you have to play him."

► Donnie Walsh is one of the few disciplined and shrewd general managers the Knicks have had in recent years, having wisely and patiently cleared the books of the team's catalog of terrible contracts. That put the Knicks in position to sign Amare Stoudemire last summer, as well as to make the trade for Chauncey Billups and Carmelo Anthony. It is only fitting, then, that head honcho James Dolan is considering



Teams know the way to get to Howard is by roughing him up, so he can expect more of this in the playoffs.

replacing Walsh. Stability and wisdom don't play well with this organization.

► Another miserable season for Minnesota makes you wonder whether Kurt Rambis' triangle offense is the right fit for the group of players he has on hand. When they hired Rambis with a four-year deal in 2009, the Timberwolves were touting a four-year plan. But he might not be around for the remainder of that contract.

► Lakers assistant Brian Shaw was on the brink of taking the head coaching job with the Cavaliers last summer, but he changed his mind after he asked Cleveland's brass what the plan was if the team could not re-sign LeBron James. They had no answer, so Shaw turned down the job. Now, he has Kobe Bryant lobbying for him to take over the Lakers when coach Phil Jackson retires. Smart move.

A tough first year, but it'll get better

It was a rough year in Washington, where the Wizards have just started their rebuilding plan and consistently put out one of the league's youngest lineups. That includes rookie **John Wall**, last year's No. 1 pick. He spoke with *Sporting News* about the difficulty of this 23-59 season—and what he sees in the team's future.



The record is tough. It's tough to lose so many games and not have a chance to make the playoffs. But we have had a lot of injuries; we have had a couple of

trades going. We have a lot of guys from the D-League who are here trying to make a name for themselves and help us out. I knew coming in it was going to be a rebuilding process, and we're doing the right thing as

far as getting some young guys like Jordan Crawford and veteran guys like Rashard Lewis to help us out. But it's tough.

I look at Kevin Durant—the Thunder, with Russell Westbrook, those guys, they were 23-59 a couple of years ago. Look at where they are now, top four in the Western Conference. You go to a place like Boston, and you see the film before the game and they're talking about 17 championships. That's something you want to start building toward. I don't think you'll get all 17 in your

career, but you at least want to get in there and get one.

We see ourselves in the playoffs next year, trying to make a run. It is not going to come easy. This year was a good learning experience for me. I have a lot to work on, a lot to improve. My jump shot, I have been making it a little better, but I need to get it consistent. That is what I will work on. We all just need to work this summer and come back and have a year under our belt—we can be better.

—As told to Sean Devaney

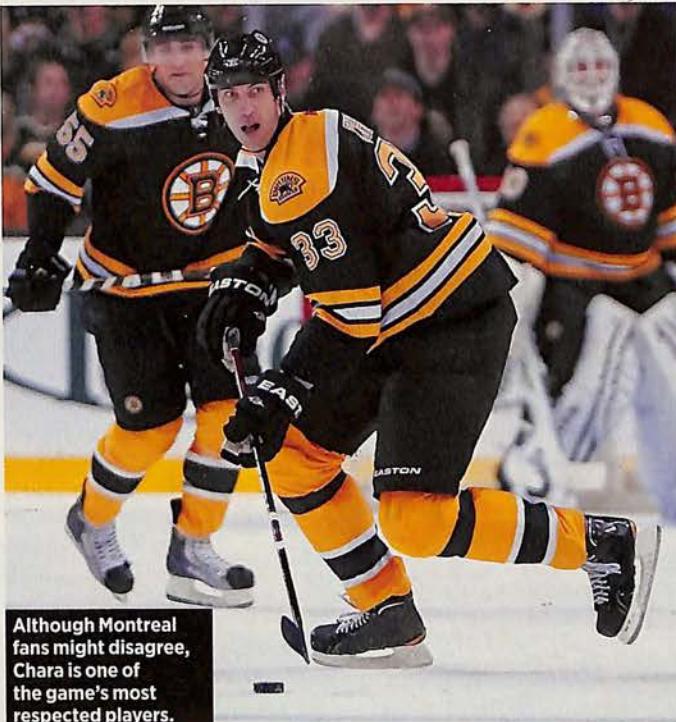
SHOTS ON GOAL

A hard hit doesn't make a player dirty

➤ The first-round playoff matchup between the Bruins and Canadiens has rekindled the hatred for 6-9 defenseman Zdeno Chara in Montreal—hatred that reached a fever pitch after his big hit sent Max Pacioretty to the sideline with a concussion and a fractured vertebra in March. But making a villain out of Chara, who is one of the game's most respected players, is unfair to the former Norris winner. He may be hated in Montreal, but he's not a dirty player. "He's mean, and that goes with your competitive nature," says former teammate Aaron Ward. "Dirty is your being, your makeup. You're either a dirty player or you're not. He's not. He hits hard, he hits for impact, but he's not looking to kill anybody."

➤ Some consolation for Stars fans after their team barely missed the playoffs is the emergence of goalie Kari Lehtonen. He had trouble staying on the ice in the past and didn't always take care of his body. This season, he played a career-high 69 games for Dallas, and his 34 wins tied a career best. Some close to Lehtonen credit his maturity to the stability that resulted from getting married. Now there's no reason to rush prospect Jack Campbell.

➤ No surprise to see Pete DeBoer fired in Florida, where his personality didn't mesh with easygoing G.M. Dale Tallon's. DeBoer's style didn't mesh with the players', either. He should get another shot at coaching in the NHL, but he'll need to prove he has made the adjustment to coaching NHL players and personalities rather than junior athletes. Some questioned how he treated certain Florida players, which he'll need to address.



Although Montreal fans might disagree, Chara is one of the game's most respected players.

➤ The ownership issues surrounding the Coyotes have mostly been kept off the ice. The team has been remarkably resilient for two seasons, especially considering the players have not known which city they will live in the next year. But it all could have an impact on franchise goalie Ilya Bryzgalov, who can become an unrestricted free agent this summer. G.M. Don Maloney would love to get a contract extension finalized, but until a new owner is in place, it's tough to spend big money. Will Bryzgalov test the market? "He has to," an NHL scout says. "Even if it's to get more money from Phoenix." Bryzgalov is a franchise-changer and losing him would be devastating for the Coyotes.

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You're either a dirty player or you're not. (Chara is) not.

—Former teammate Aaron Ward

OPEN BALLOT

As a voting member of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association, *Sporting News'* Craig Custance has a say in the awards the NHL hands out annually in Las Vegas. A peek at his ballot for the top three honors picked by the writers:



HART TROPHY

COREY PERRY,
F, DUCKS



He was the NHL's only 50-goal scorer, which is impressive enough. But the Hart is given to the player who is "adjudged to be the most valuable to his team." Perry was exactly that. He raised his game when Ryan Getzlaf was injured, then found another gear when the Ducks were fighting to make the playoffs. He had 19 goals in 19 games in March and April, helping them to the No. 4 seed in the West.

Runner-up: Daniel Sedin, Canucks. He could end up splitting votes with teammate Ryan Kesler.



NORRIS TROPHY

NICKLAS LIDSTROM,
F, RED WINGS



Like last year, this was a tight race. But nobody played against tougher competition every single shift than Lidstrom. He makes the subtle plays that win games and, at 40 years old, trailed only Anaheim's Lubomir Visnovsky in scoring by a defenseman with 62 points.

Runner-up: Zdeno Chara, Bruins. The March Max Pacioretty incident in Montreal overshadowed another strong season from Boston's captain.



CALDER TROPHY

JEFF SKINNER,
F, HURRICANES



There's no doubt a couple of general managers regret letting Skinner slip to No. 7 in the 2010 draft. He led all rookies with 63 points and finished third in rookie goal-scoring. He sealed this vote with his strong play down the stretch, when the Hurricanes desperately needed production. Nine of his 31 goals came in March and April.

Runner-up: Logan Couture, Sharks. A 32-goal scorer, Couture gives San Jose another dimension up front and was the Sharks' best forward in the first half.



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THE LEAD LAP

The edge for Roush cars? They have no speed limit



Edwards (99) leads the Cup standings, but Kenseth and the rest of the Roush drivers have the speed to compete.

All else being equal, the fastest car wins the race, and in terms of early-season speed, no other organization looks as potent as Roush Fenway Racing. Carl Edwards has been fast all year, and teammate Matt Kenseth, whose victory at Texas broke a 76-race winless drought, is showing the form that carried him to a Cup title in 2003. David Ragan, who won his first career pole at Texas, is in a contract year and highly motivated—especially with the push he's getting from Roush Nationwide drivers Trevor Bayne and Ricky Stenhouse Jr.

➤ Is it time for Dale Earnhardt Jr. and crew chief Steve Letarte to put more effort into qualifying? Through eight races, Earnhardt's average starting position was 22.4—and that includes credit for a pole at the Daytona 500, where he actually took the green flag from the rear after having to switch to a backup car. Maybe if Junior didn't have to pass so many cars to get to the front, he'd contend for victories more often. Still, Earnhardt fans should be delighted with an average finish of 10th place.

➤ Joey Logano is a poster child for Murphy's Law this year. He was 24th in points after eight races, with just one top 10, largely because of a litany of misfortunes. This after he showed such promise at the end of last season. Unless he moves into the top 20 and picks up a win or two, the driver known as Sliced Bread (as in the best thing since) is more

likely toast where the Chase is concerned. Goodyear had a quiet year in 2010, but this season has been more problematic. NASCAR's tire supplier has tried to strike a balance between predictability and the drivers' desire for more grip in their right-side rubber. Tire-making involves complex chemistry, and the tires brought to Bristol and Martinsville simply didn't behave the way Goodyear expected. Perhaps additional tire testing is warranted, but short of having a full field of cars on the track, it's difficult to determine whether rubber will adhere to the racing surface as intended.

➤ Where's the new blood? It's sad to say, but the rookie of the year program in the Cup Series is suffering from a dearth of competition. Kevin Conway won an uncontested title last year. This season, Andy Lally is the only declared candidate.

Maybe if Junior didn't have to pass so many cars to get to the front, he'd contend for victories more often.

The All-Star Race is the next big stage for Bayne

The Sprint All-Star Race now has the Daytona 500 winner in its lineup.

➤ Trevor Bayne's season-opening victory made him eligible for the high-paying shootout in May at Charlotte, but the No. 21 he drives for Wood Brothers Racing isn't fully funded for the season and didn't have a sponsor for that race.

Until Good Sam Club came on board April 12.

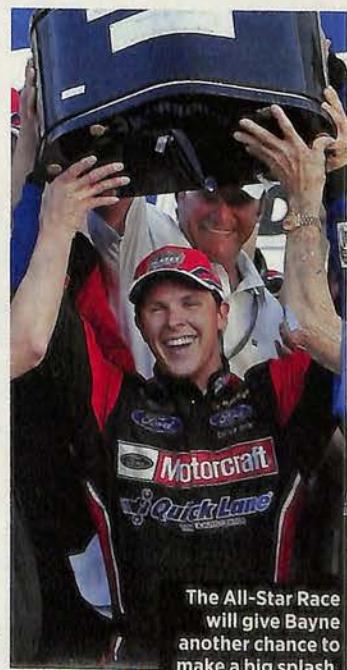
"The All-Star Race will be a lot of fun—no stress, no pressure—but, for me, it's kind of been that way all year because we're not running for the (Cup) championship," Bayne says. "The All-Star Race is different because all the guys are out there having fun."

Bayne says he's fine after being hospitalized following the April 9 Cup race at Texas because of an apparent insect bite near his elbow.

"It was just kind of getting worse, and my arm went kind of numb in the racecar (at Texas)," Bayne says. "So when we landed, I just went to the hospital to get it checked out, and they gave me antibiotics and fluids and it all went away."

"So it looks like I'm not gonna turn into Spider-Man, unfortunately."

— Reid Spencer



The All-Star Race will give Bayne another chance to make a big splash.

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH ... four-time Cup champion Jeff Gordon

He's no longer the Wonder Boy and he hasn't won a Cup title since 2001, but Jeff Gordon already has one victory to his credit this season. Off the track, Gordon recently launched a campaign to fight pertussis (whooping cough). He talked with *Sporting News* about that effort and also squeezed in a little racing.

SN: Tell us about the Sounds of Pertussis campaign.

GORDON: It's a joint effort with Sanofi Pasteur (a vaccination company) and the March of Dimes. We're launching the Race to Blanket America, which is to help blanket the country with pertussis information and encourage adults to get vaccinated against pertussis. How I became a part of this is as a parent. When our daughter, Ella, was born, we had no idea how we were putting her at risk by not being vaccinated ourselves as adults. We can easily get pertussis. And especially if we're around infants, we can pass it along to them.

SN: There was a lot of talk after Martinsville about whether Dale Earnhardt Jr. should have nudged Kevin Harvick out of the way. If it were you, would you have done it?

GORDON: If I was Dale Jr., I would have pushed him out of the way. I feel like if you're Dale Jr., you can get away with anything. It's been a long time since he won a race; he had a car capable of

winning. I think the place would have stood up and cheered. I wouldn't have moved Harvick out of the way, but if I were Junior, I would have.

SN: If the 1980s were Dale Earnhardt's, the 1990s were yours and the 2000s were Jimmie Johnson's, whose will this decade be?

GORDON: I think (Denny) Hamlin has that opportunity. I think Carl (Edwards) has that opportunity. I think someone like (Clint) Bowyer has that opportunity. I think you'll see some big things out of Harvick, but I wouldn't call it a decade, though.

SN: You might not know this, but you're going to turn 40 in a few months.

GORDON: Oh, I'm well aware of it.

SN: If 40-year-old Jeff Gordon could talk to 20-year-old Jeff Gordon, what would you tell him?

GORDON: I probably would figure out how to keep Ray Evernham as my crew chief a little bit longer. We made a great team. I think we moved on fairly quickly through a year and a half of a rough patch. That's just part of the sport. He had a great opportunity, I had a great opportunity, we went our separate ways, and it all worked out fine. But I think we would've won more championships had we stayed together.

— Matt Crossman



Gordon's daughter, Ella, was the inspiration for his latest charity campaign.

PIT BOX

IS SHOW AND TELL GOOD FOR PIT ROAD SPEEDS?

After incurring a speeding penalty on pit road at Martinsville, five-time defending Sprint Cup champion Jimmie Johnson called for NASCAR to display those speeds in real time. *Sporting News* asked 1989 Cup champion Rusty Wallace whether he thought posting pit road speeds publicly would be an enhancement to the sport.



Johnson wants pit road speeds displayed more like the way fastball speeds are in baseball.

It might be a little bit more entertaining. It might be another thing for the fans to look at, another piece of content. So I'm all for it—I can't think of anything negative. The only thing I will say, when it's displayed, the race teams will still be trying to push the limit maybe that much more, seeing all the times in real time. So because of that, they may get busted more. So you'd better be careful what you ask for.

— As told to Reid Spencer

A photograph of a Mobil 1 motor oil bottle, which is silver with a black cap and features the "Mobil 1" logo.

Mobil 1

Mobil 1 and Tony Stewart. A winning relationship. Get the full story about the Official Motor Oil of NASCAR at mobil1.com

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FIRST-AND-10

No pink slip for Floyd: Irish need help on offense

1. Nice to see Notre Dame's Office of Residence Life take a stand with receiver Michael Floyd's DUI, essentially announcing Floyd is on double-secret probation.

*Cheer, cheer for old Notre Dame:
The offense needs help,
We have no shame.*

2. Am I the only one who thinks the courtship between the Big East and Villanova for 'Nova to move up to the FBS is blatantly desperate and embarrassing?

3. And on the eighth day, God finally—and mercifully—ruled on USC's appeal.

4. The NCAA just now has gotten around to reminding former players that giving money to current players is a no-no. In related news, the NCAA staff is working on a memo advising current coaches that lying to NCAA investigators is—wait for it—also a no-no.

It's in these moments when I'm reminded of the subtle words of wisdom the great communicator Houston Nutt once told me when addressing the lunacy of a particular situation: "I've offended those who were offended by the people who were offended."

5. Terrelle Pryor tweeted he is returning for his senior season at Ohio State and not leaving school for the NFL's supplemental draft. Just a friendly reminder: The season before T.P. arrived, Ohio State went to the national championship game with some guy named Todd Boeckman at quarterback. And hasn't been back since.

6. Virginia Commonwealth (see: UTEP) doesn't beat Kansas (see: Alabama) in a national football playoff. Our postseason attempts to get the best games possible—not cater to degenerate gamblers.

7. Sleeper teams in BCS leagues: Georgia (SEC), Arizona State (Pac-12), Baylor (Big 12), Illinois (Big Ten), North Carolina (ACC), South Florida (Big East).

Our
postseason
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gamblers.

Don't second-guess Gamecocks' first option

There was a point this spring when controversy led to questions, which led to second-guessing of South Carolina's stature in the SEC, which led Steve Spurrier to make the statement of the offseason.

In the middle of the Gamecocks going through yet another off-field distraction with another suspension of enigmatic quarterback

Stephen Garcia, Spurrier turned the conversation where it should have been all along:

Toward Marcus Lattimore. "We don't throw a lot, anyway," Spurrier says of Garcia's indefinite suspension, "as long as Marcus is back there."

It's not like Spurrier hadn't already been planning for more Lattimore and less Garcia

before Garcia's troubles. At the end of the 2010 season, after Lattimore had developed into the SEC's best tailback as a freshman—yep, better than Mark Ingram and Trent Richardson at Alabama—the South Carolina staff decided he needed more weight.

More weight for more carries. Why? In three previous years, Garcia has 32 interceptions. Last season, Lattimore ran for 1,197 yards and 17 touchdowns on 249 carries.

Expect his carries to exceed 300 this fall.

"Whoever the quarterback is," Lattimore says, "I'm going to take it and run with it."

Lattimore has bulked up to 233 pounds after playing much of last season in the 215 range. He says he hasn't lost speed or his ability to stick a foot and gain a sudden change of direction—two critical factors in his game.

He wants to play around 227 pounds during the season, knowing that every week this

fall could look a lot like his breakout game of 2010, when he rushed for 182 yards and two TDs against Georgia. On 37 carries.

"I know what's coming, and I want to be durable," Lattimore says. "I just want to last the whole season. I'm confident our coaches know what a good weight is for me."

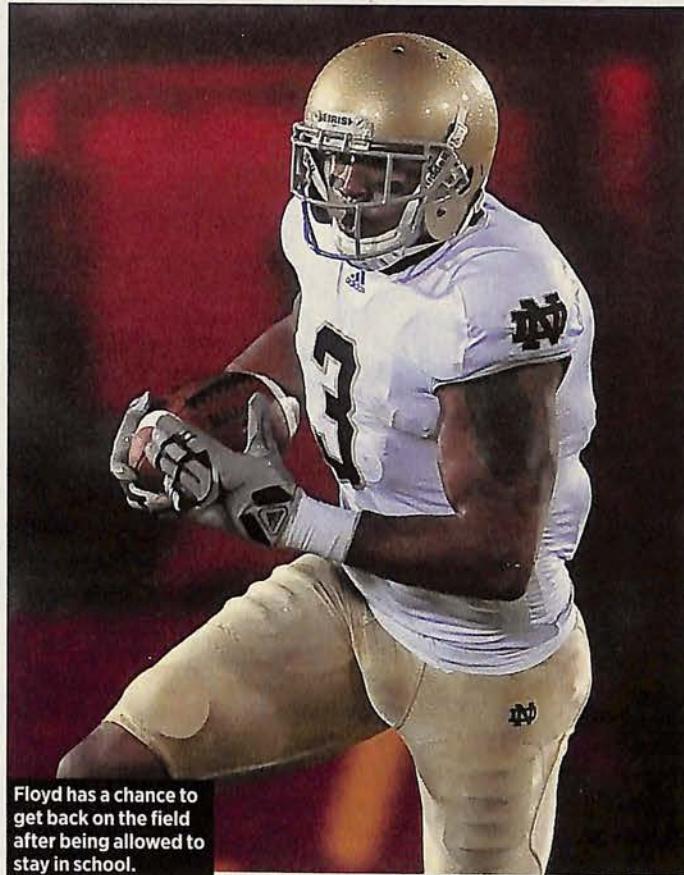
Just enough to carry the weight of a team. And its expectations.

— Matt Hayes



Marcus Lattimore

FLOYD: GARY A. VASQUEZ / US PRESSWIRE; LATIMORE: BOB LEVINE / SNS



Floyd has a chance to get back on the field after being allowed to stay in school.

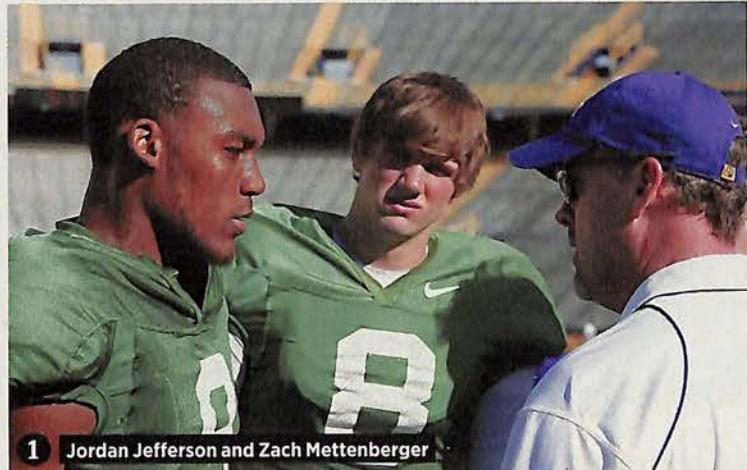
8. Look what Dana Holgorsen did for Brandon Weeden at Oklahoma State in 2010. Imagine what he'll do for West Virginia quarterback Geno Smith—a strong-armed, poorly-coached talent a year ago—in a conference that will have no idea how to stop Holgorsen's offense.

9. Two quarterbacks who desperately needed big springs—Garrett Gilbert of Texas and John Brantley of Florida—bombed in spring games. Don't be surprised if neither is playing by October.

10. This just in: The Big East is in cone-of-silence talks with Canisius College about building a football program and taking on the world. I mean, the BCS.

15 things we learned from spring practices

By Dave Curtis
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1 Jordan Jefferson and Zach Mettenberger



2 Cliff Harris



6
E.J. Manuel

Fifteen. That's how many spring practices teams have to straighten out all that went wrong in 2010—and to start putting together the pieces of a brighter 2011. Whether it's shaking out a quarterback race or getting players adjusted to new schemes, spring football is a lot of work squeezed into a few short weeks. And while it can all change in a snap this fall, here's a look at 15 things we learned this spring:

1. LSU's Jordan Jefferson has survived another quarterback derby. The senior—who has been fantastic one Saturday, frustrating the next—held off junior college transfer Zach Mettenberger to stay with the first-string offense.

2. The Oregon defense isn't worried about losing five pieces of last year's front seven.

Bombastic junior cornerback Cliff Harris seems confident in the new blood, especially sophomore tackle Ricky Heimuli. "I want people to think we're going to slip some," Harris says. "That makes it better when we show them we haven't."

3. Oklahoma State is addressing its biggest weakness. In losses to Nebraska and Oklahoma last season, the Cowboys allowed points on 17 of 29 possessions, excluding kneeldowns. The secondary showed promise this spring, but it must carry that over to Big 12 play. "We're finding the guys we need," senior safety Markelle Martin says, "and we've got them in the right spots."

4. The replacements for Boise State's All-WAC receivers have earned the coaches' trust. Exit Austin Pettis and Titus Young, enter ... Tyler Shoemaker and Kirby Moore? The new guys won't post NFL-ready 40 times and verticals, but this spring they convinced the coaches they can help keep the Broncos' offense humming.

5. Finally, Notre Dame can lean on its defense. Young linemen Louis Nix and Aaron Lynch give ND a rotation up front, and outside linebackers Darius Fleming and Prince Shembo have star qualities. "There's a complete different

energy on that side of the ball," senior center Braxton Cave says.

6. Florida State quarterback E.J. Manuel is a wild card. Manuel is capable of leading a championship run or derailing a talent-loaded team. He threw two interceptions in the spring game and didn't run much behind a patchwork line.

7. Ohio State doesn't have to fear those first five games without Terrelle Pryor and Co. The Buckeyes could fill three starting backfields with their talented runners, and linemen John Simon and Florida State transfer cornerback Dionte Allen have recharged the defense.

8. Done are the Michigan defensive line's days as a Big Ten laughingstock. A 4-3 scheme appears to be helping veterans Mike Martin and Ryan Van Bergen. New coach Brady Hoke, coordinator Greg Mattison and line coach Jerry Montgomery specialize in making big boys better.

9. Five new assistant coaches' energy and creativity are invigorating Texas. But quarterback Garrett Gilbert could drain all that with

interceptions. He's dueling sophomore Case McCoy, you-know-who's little brother, to be the starter. "We need more from our quarterbacks," senior running back Fozzy Whittaker says.

10. TCU has a problem on the offensive line. The Frogs failed to find steady play from their linemen all spring. Losing quarterback Andy Dalton will dominate the chatter, but missing tackle Marcus Cannon and center Jake Kirkpatrick might matter more.

11. Lost in the media's cyber-pummeling of Florida quarterback John Brantley is the SEC's new defensive line force. End/linebacker Ronald Powell and tackle Sharif Floyd were impressive this spring and give the Gators their strongest front since the Ray McDonald-led group that won a national title.

12. If Penn State coach Joe Paterno's anxiety about his offensive line spills into September, his Nittany Lions are staring at a second straight 7-6 season. The main thing with them was the

timing," sophomore running back Silas Redd says. "They really got better toward the end of spring ball."

13. West Virginia's red zone offense will be better. The 2010 Mountaineers held every opponent below 24 points ... and still lost four games. New offensive coordinator Dana Holgorsen rebooted the red zone attack, which tied for 104th in the nation in efficiency last season.

14. Georgia quarterback Aaron Murray, the SEC's premier thrower, can expect to spend the fall dodging defensive linemen. Offensive tackle Trenton Sturdivant's ACL tear, his third major knee injury in four seasons, has left the Bulldogs scrambling for experienced blockers.

15. New coach Todd Graham has brought Pitt into the 21st century with a three-snaps-per-minute spread offense. "You'll see me catching the ball a lot more," junior running back Ray Graham says. "You'll see a lot of zone reads. We're really going to go."



BRIAN STRAUS

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DIRECT KICK

Young MLS players are learning how to be pros

American player development took another step forward when D.C. United became the first MLS team to field three home-grown athletes simultaneously. MLS now mandates youth programs mirror those abroad, where talented teenagers are coached to be pros rather than win pointless youth tournaments.

The contributions of D.C. goalie Bill Hamid, 20, defender Ethan White, 20, and winger Andy Najar, 18, have been considerable but represent something far greater: The U.S. national team and MLS finally are playing by the same rules.

MLS commissioner Don Garber put new Toronto FC coach Aron Winter, a former Dutch national team member, in his place after he banned media from the locker room. Garber said, "That's not the culture that exists in North American sport," and ordered the doors reopened. Many European coaches have failed in MLS because they refuse to adapt. Winter is off to a bad start.

Landon Donovan missed the L.A. Galaxy's April 9 game but still struck a blow with a postgame tweet aimed at D.C. United forward Charlie Davies, who earned a game-tying penalty kick. Wrote Donovan: "I got @CharlieDavies9 some gear in case he decides to dive again. Couldn't find a scuba mask though." Attached to his tweet was a photo of a bathing suit and a towel. Even



Bill Hamid



Ethan White



Andy Najar

while injured, Donovan helps advance the sport. Calling out divers is a must.

The U.S. national team is being done a significant disservice by England's Aston Villa, a club owned by American Randy Lerner. Villa took midfielder Michael Bradley on loan from a German club in January, but he has appeared in just two games since. The United States will enter this summer's Gold Cup with one of its most important players out of form.

Several original MLS clubs continue to lag in attendance. The good news from newer markets shouldn't overshadow problems in Denver (the champion Colorado Rapids averaged 13,498 fans in their first two home games) or New England (the Revolution are averaging 9,333 fans through three matches). Revolution owner Robert Kraft has figured out the NFL but remains flummoxed by MLS.

This summer's marquee friendly will be the MLS All-Star Game vs.

Manchester United on July 27. It's Man U's second consecutive appearance, the sixth by an English club in seven years. For American fans to turn off the Premier League and start buying MLS tickets, though, league officials must look beyond England for validation.

Credit the Philadelphia Union for agreeing to move its April 23 game at Real Salt Lake to September 3 so RSL can rest between the April 20 and April 27 CONCACAF Champions League finals matches vs. Monterrey. MLS clubs are 0-21 all-time south of the border, and Salt Lake will need every bit of help to advance to the FIFA Club World Cup.

Brian Straus is Sporting News' soccer beat writer. SN is launching coverage of North American soccer, including MLS, the U.S. national team and American players abroad. For daily news, visit aol.sportingnews.com/soccer.

HAMD/WHT/ROB CARR / GETTY IMAGES; NAJAR: ELSA / GETTY IMAGES; WONDOLOWSKI: THEARON W. HENDERSON / GETTY IMAGES

Even while injured, Donovan helps advance the sport. Calling out divers is a must.

Pressure points

Performing under pressure is part of competition at the highest level, and a sign of Major League Soccer's growth is the fact fans and media are now expecting more from certain players. Hype, salary and past performance contribute to increased expectations. Three high-profile players not named David Beckham with something to prove in 2011:

THIERRY HENRY, NEW YORK RED BULLS.

The French legend impresses people with his easygoing nature—he even rides the train from his Manhattan condo to Red Bull Arena. But the \$5.6 million man has yet to live up to his billing on the field. He scored just twice last fall after signing with the Red Bulls and has scored just one goal so far this season while battling an Achilles' injury. New Yorkers want more.

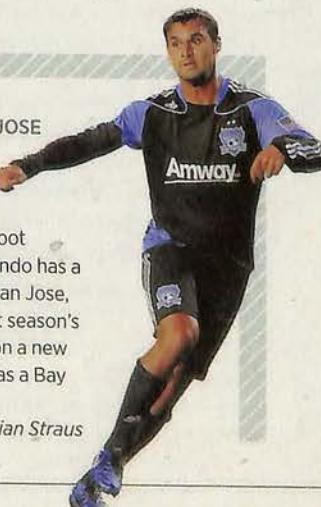
FREDY MONTERO, SEATTLE

SOUNDERS. After posting 24 goals and 18 assists in his first two seasons in Seattle, Montero signed a designated player contract in December. The big raise hasn't resulted in increased production. The club slumped to a 1-2-3 start with Montero scoreless in the four games he has played. He has missed time with a wrist injury.

CHRIS WONDOLOWSKI, SAN JOSE

EARTHQUAKES. This year, opponents will be waiting. Was the 28-year-old's stunning 2010 rise from journeyman to Golden Boot winner (19 MLS goals) a fluke? Wondo has a lot riding on this season, as does San Jose, which is looking to improve on last season's semifinal run and make progress on a new stadium that will cement the club as a Bay Area fixture.

— Brian Straus



Still debating the Beckham Experiment

In the final year of his Galaxy contract, it's difficult to determine whether David Beckham's MLS career can be called a success

By Brian Straus

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No one can argue that David Beckham doesn't fight for the shirt—when he's actually wearing it.

When Beckham steps on the field in Los Angeles Galaxy white, the superficial is stripped away. Brand Beckham is left behind. What remains is the gritty, determined athlete who, at his core, has always been about playing the game.

It was evident throughout an early-season draw in D.C. when Landon Donovan was injured and Beckham, who will turn 36 in May, carried the load. He defended with vigor, often retreating deep into his own half to marshal a Galaxy side that struggled with possession. He set up L.A.'s goal with a trademark corner kick and earned his fourth yellow card of the season with a vicious takedown of D.C. forward Josh Wolff late in the first half.

"If the tackle would've happened to him, he'd have went bonkers," says United's Santino Quaranta, who angrily confronted Beckham after the play.

The pair continued jawing at halftime, the impossibly wealthy global icon and decorated veteran of Manchester United and Real Madrid chasing down an MLS lifer who makes less than 2 percent of Beckham's \$6.5 million annual salary.

"I like it. A lot," Quaranta says of Beckham's fire.

Would he want Beckham as a teammate?

"Of course. Not just because of the 'it' factor but because of his passion," Quaranta says.

No one can argue that when in uniform, Beckham is all hustle and heart. But as he plays out the fifth and final year of his blockbuster MLS contract, the impact and legacy of the Beckham Experiment remains the subject of debate. Heart can't be quantified. But the number of missed games and accolades won can, and those numbers aren't flattering.

There was the ankle injury in 2007, stints with England, loans to AC Milan in 2009 and 2010 arranged to prepare Beckham for last summer's World Cup

and the Achilles' surgery that forced him to miss it. As a result, Beckham has played in just 63 competitive matches for L.A.

The return on that investment in terms of on-field success has been equally flimsy. L.A.'s only trophy since his arrival in 2007, the Supporters Shield earned last year for posting the league's best regular-season record, was well in hand by the time Beckham returned from injury in September. He has yet to win any kind of individual honor.

Factor in the tension caused by his management company's early meddling in Galaxy affairs and the frustration felt by fans convinced Beckham's overseas sojourns revealed a lack of commitment and he has a body of work that hasn't lived up to the heady promise.

Still, there are other ways to measure success.

"Two weeks ago, we played at home. It was the worst rain that I've ever seen, and we had a packed stadium," Beckham says. "So, to have the support that we've got from our fans and to see almost a full stadium (in D.C.), you know it shows the progression the sport has made. Especially with new franchises coming into the league and players like Thierry Henry coming into the league (in New York), it all helps raise the profile."

The crowds have certainly followed Beckham. So has growth. MLS now has 18 teams and will have 19 in 2012—there were 13 when he joined the league.

He's still the only player in the league who can pull off a segment on *Good Morning America*, and there's no doubt American soccer's Q Score soared as a result of his arrival. Perhaps the on-field results are secondary.

"The David Beckham signing will be viewed as one of the historic milestones in MLS history," commissioner Don Garber says. "The anticipation and excitement around the league, the media attention all escalated. It's hard for anybody to argue that it wasn't a good



To see Beckham's contributions to the Galaxy, you have to look past the numbers.

MIA IN MLS

David Beckham has played in only 63 of a possible 129 competitive games for the Galaxy since 2007.

2007

Team	Games	Starts	Goals
L.A. GALAXY	7	4	1
ENGLAND	5	4	0

2008

Team	Games	Starts	Goals
L.A. GALAXY	25	25	5
ENGLAND	8	4	0

2009

Team	Games	Starts	Goals
L.A. GALAXY	15	15	2
AC MILAN	20	19	2

2010

Team	Games	Starts	Goals
L.A. GALAXY	10	8	2
AC MILAN	13	8	0

2011

Team	Games	Starts	Goals
L.A. GALAXY	6	6	0



DENNIS DILLON

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What's next?
Chris Johnson
competing in
roller derby?

BY CHARGERS
CB ANTOINE
CASON

My offseason plans

Catch more balls. I have to take advantage of every opportunity that comes my way. I definitely can practice that. In practice, every ball that comes my way I have to treat as a game situation. It's also a comfort thing. I can have all the confidence in the world,

but I have to reach a comfort level. That's the difference between starting at Arizona four years and starting now. **Get better at film study.** When I see things, I want to be able to process exactly what it is. I want to be able to process faster throughout the course of

the game. That comes from film study.

Stay more consistent. I have to play the same way throughout the whole game. It's a focus thing. I have to play every quarter like it's the first quarter.

Give back. What I want to do this offseason that's different than others

is be more active in the community—camps or going to see kids. I don't have to have my own foundation. I can help out teammates. I like to go by word of mouth. If someone asks me, I'm always up for that.

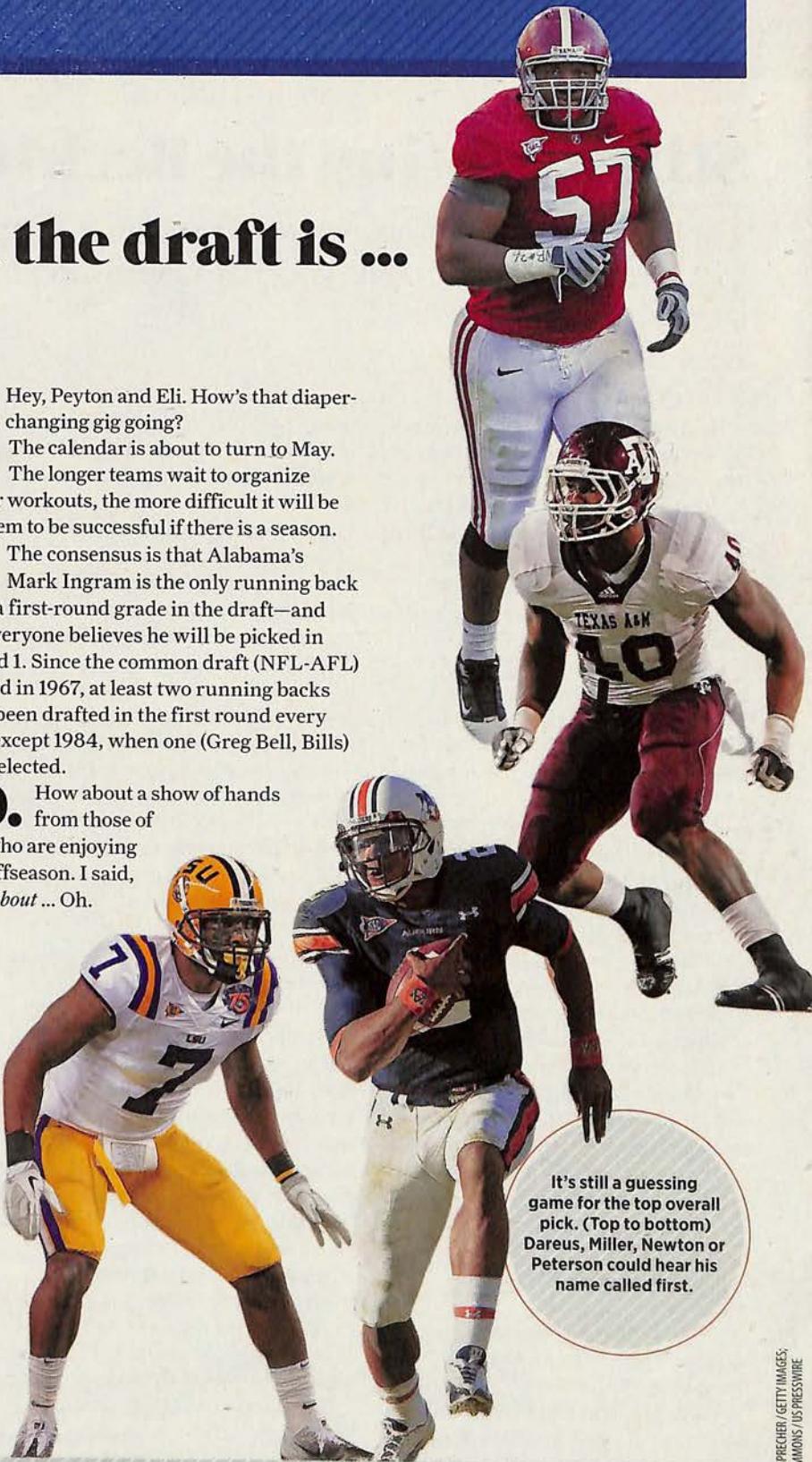
—As told to Kevin Acee

DIME PACKAGE

The No. 1 pick in the draft is ... anybody's guess

1. I couldn't tell you who the No. 1 pick in this draft will be if my job depended on it (hope you're not reading this, Boss). Cam Newton? Marcell Dareus? Von Miller? Patrick Peterson? It could be any of them.
2. Until further evidence presents itself, the NFC South is the best division in the NFL. It was the only one that had three teams (Falcons, Saints and Bucs) with double-digit wins last year.
3. Can't imagine how frustrating the lockout is for Carolina's Ron Rivera, Cleveland's Pat Shurmur, Tennessee's Mike Munchak and Oakland's Hue Jackson. They've worked all this time to become head coaches and now they can't put any of their plans in motion.
4. A lot has been made—including an ESPN hourlong special *The Brady 6*—about the six quarterbacks who were drafted ahead of Tom Brady in 2000. How about the Johnny U 2? In 1955, George Shaw (first overall, Colts) and Ralph Guglielmi (fourth overall, Redskins) were drafted well ahead of future Hall of Fame quarterback Johnny Unitas, who was picked by the Steelers in the ninth round and later cut. Shaw and Guglielmi had a combined career record of 18-32-5 as starting QBs.
5. Let's see. Tom Zbikowski and Ray Edwards have taken up boxing. James Laurinaitis is considering wrestling. What's next? Chris Johnson competing in roller derby?
6. If the Democrats and Republicans can put their differences aside long enough to avert a government shutdown, you would think the owners and players could get together to prevent the 2011 season from being lost.

7. Hey, Peyton and Eli. How's that diaper-changing gig going?
8. The calendar is about to turn to May. The longer teams wait to organize player workouts, the more difficult it will be for them to be successful if there is a season.
9. The consensus is that Alabama's Mark Ingram is the only running back with a first-round grade in the draft—and not everyone believes he will be picked in Round 1. Since the common draft (NFL-AFL) started in 1967, at least two running backs have been drafted in the first round every year except 1984, when one (Greg Bell, Bills) was selected.
10. How about a show of hands from those of you who are enjoying this offseason. I said, *How about ... Oh.*



It's still a guessing game for the top overall pick. (Top to bottom) Dareus, Miller, Newton or Peterson could hear his name called first.

STARTING FIVE

Searches are no science for N.C. State

1. Does anyone embrace rejection more eagerly than N.C. State? Five years after entering a coaching search like a 9-year-old seeking autographs—and getting spurned by Rick Barnes, John Calipari and Steve Lavin—the Wolfpack were back at it this spring.

This time: Sean Miller, Jamie Dixon, Mark Turgeon, Josh Pastner. The 'Pack even took another run at Barnes and some others before the job finally went to Mark Gottfried.

That new athletic director Debbie Yow publicly blamed the botched search on the coach she dismissed, Sidney Lowe, and later the coach she left behind at Maryland, Gary Williams, says much about how this enterprise developed.

2. Who has a better gig than search firms? If your job was to help find coaches for colleges and your resume included placing Kelvin Sampson at Indiana, Billy Gillispie at Kentucky, Jeff Capel at Oklahoma, John Pelphrey at Arkansas—you shouldn't be able to find work pumping air into basketballs. The N.C. State folks paid Parker Executive Search of Atlanta to co-produce their latest farce.



3. Want an example of how the NCAA manual is more convoluted than the federal tax code? While many coaches battled the clock to secure information regarding their players' NBA draft prognoses ahead of the May 8 withdrawal deadline for early entrants, at least one with Final

N.C. State has gone after Barnes in its past two coaching searches and come up empty both times.

Four experience was unaware of Proposal 2010-24.

This disgraceful suggestion is looking to force players to make their intentions permanent nearly a month earlier—the day before the spring signing period begins (April 13 this year)—starting in 2012. Only the NCAA board of directors can stop this change; a decision will come later this month.

4. Are some people really pitching the BCS as superior to the NCAA Tournament? A better question: Are they the same people who'll spend two hours watching *Celebrity Apprentice* instead of reading a book?

5. Will American basketball ever kick its timeout addiction? So now a high school kid in Wisconsin, Reece Zoelle, had his Chris Webber moment. He called a timeout De Pere High didn't have, and the resulting technical foul cost his team a state title. Southern Illinois had the same thing happen in a nonleague game against Northeastern early in the 2010-11 season.

FIBA rules allow only the coach to call timeouts—and only when the ball is not in play. That is how it should be here.



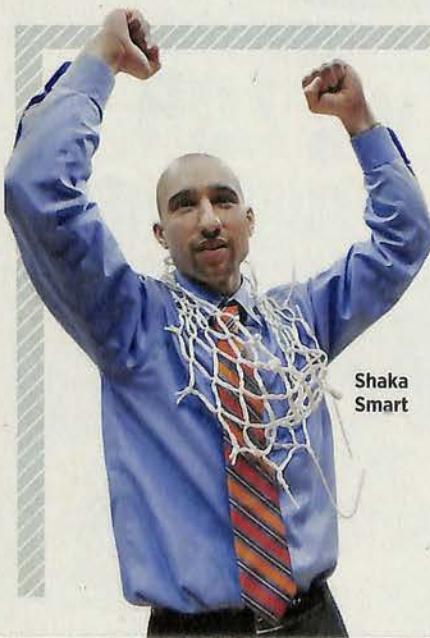
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Those who think the BCS is better than the NCAA tourney must be the same people who are inspired by *Celebrity Apprentice*



Success brings stability for coaching targets

Virginia Commonwealth athletic director Norwood Teague was grinning ear to ear as coach Shaka Smart and his 11th-seeded Rams cut down the nets after earning the school's first trip to the Final Four with an upset of top-seeded Kansas.

"I knew when I hired him, he's a special guy," Teague said in March as the confetti rained down in the Alamodome. "He's unbelievably intelligent, he's competitive, he's a great recruiter and he's an incredible person."

In short, he's a guy Teague was going to do everything in his power to keep. Mission accomplished. Smart spurned all callers—including BCS schools N.C. State and

Missouri—to stay at VCU with a fresh eight-year extension.

Smart wasn't the only hot coaching prospect to see the grass as greener on his side of the fence:

Mick Cronin, Cincinnati. He rebuilt a depleted program that earned a No. 6 seed in this year's NCAA Tournament and won 26 games. A three-year extension was enough to hold off suitors.

Gregg Marshall, Wichita State. A veteran of the coaching rumor mill from his days at Winthrop, Marshall led the Shockers to the NIT title and then turned down N.C. State.

Chris Mooney, Richmond. His Princeton pedigree and the Spiders' Sweet 16 run made

Mooney a hot name, but a 10-year extension convinced him to stay.

Josh Pastner, Memphis. An elite recruiter, he finished his up-and-down first two years at Memphis on a high note—an NCAA berth—and was given a five-year extension worth \$1.7 million annually.

Brad Stevens, Butler. He wasn't going to leave Butler for any of this year's openings, but after leading his Bulldogs to back-to-back national title games, every fan base longed for him.

Buzz Williams, Marquette. Considered the top target for Oklahoma, Williams led Marquette into the Sweet 16 and then signed a long-term extension.

—Ryan Fagan

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Can you be called a one-and-done if you don't complete the one?

Everybody knows about one-and-done, the NBA's law of the land and the scourge of college basketball for the last five years. But who has ever heard of one-third-and-done?

Only a special player could play 11 of his team's 37 games in his only season at school, announce his intentions to go pro—and immediately become the favorite to go first overall in the draft.

Kyrie Irving appears to be pulling it off. Even with Arizona's Derrick Williams hiring an agent and even if North Carolina's Harrison Barnes goes pro, they still might not knock the smooth Duke point guard off his perch at No. 1.

The lessons learned by his father, former Boston University star Drederrick Irving, are paying off for the son. The elder Irving rose from the rough-and-tumble Mitchel Houses in the South Bronx to secure a free education, a pro career overseas and a postcareer job that provided him advantages he didn't have growing up. Irving raised Kyrie and older sister Asia after his wife died when they were young. They both made it to college—Kyrie with a rare basketball skill set and mindset.

"He deserves the credit," Drederrick Irving insists. "I just showed him a blueprint. He just followed it. Plus, he figured it all

out at a young age, and he had the wherewithal to make it happen."

Contrary to popular belief, one-and-done players are not automatically forging a path to failure in basketball and life, victims of self-serving advice that does them no good. The Derrick Roses, Kevin Durants and John Walls of the world have proved that.

With Irving, the wisdom of leaving school after a toe injury erased 26 games of his only season is another issue. Yet his case for making this leap is airtight—playing in the NBA has always been his dream, he knows he has proved he can hack it in the pros, and Duke has blue-chip guard Austin Rivers signed. And that's a credit to Irving and his upbringing, one that was so strong that, even with the riches lying ahead, he still promised his father that he would graduate, and his father still plans to hold him to it.

The only possible derailment in Irving's path is ... well, whether there is an NBA for him to play in. A lost season seems even more likely right now than it does in the NFL.

So as a rookie, Irving might not set foot on a court for a real game. It probably won't matter. He hardly set foot on one as a college freshman, and he made it work out for him anyway.

Irving's case for making this leap is airtight ... and that's a credit to him and his upbringing.



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Let's be honest—in sports, like life, things aren't always black and white

If you want to confuse your kids about sportsmanship, be sure they catch a commercial that has been airing around the country.

Its set is a high school basketball game. Two players lunge for a ball that goes out of bounds. The official says the ball went off the player in red.

There's a timeout. The player in white, Alex, goes to the bench and tells his coach that he touched the ball last.

His teammates give him grief. His coach grimaces, but he indicates Alex should inform the official. As he jogs away, the coach yells to him. "Alex," he says. "Good call." Sorry, Alex. Not so good call. We're all for honesty, and I'd hug Alex if he were my son. But sports and life aren't nearly that simple.

Imagine if every player acted like Alex. If a defender hacked a shooter and it wasn't called, would he stop play and inform the ref? If a player lingered in the lane for 3.2 seconds, would he call an infraction on himself?

Apply the Alex principle to other sports. A baserunner is mistakenly called safe at home plate. Does he get up, dust himself off and tell the umpire to nullify the run?

Remember the "Hand of God" goal in the 1986 World Cup? If Maradona had told the official he touched the ball, he would have had

to enter Argentina's Witness Protection Program.

Golfers are supposed to enforce their game's rules. In most other sports, officials officiate and players play. Both parties do their best. If the refs fail to be perfect, it's not cheating to accept their decision.

The group behind the ad, The Foundation for a Better Life, had

noble intentions. But you wonder if anybody there ever played sports.

"It's a great illustration of fairness and all," Tom Lopes says. "But I don't know if it's practical."

Lopes is the executive director of the International Association of Approved Basketball Officials. In more than 40 years of officiating, he has never had a player pull an Alex.

Sports can teach great lessons, but I'd hate for Alex to feel guilty for doing nothing wrong. Even the larger life lesson could confuse him.

In a few years, Alex and another guy are vying for the same job. The company awards it to Alex even though he secretly believes the other guy deserves it more.

What's he supposed to do, turn it down? I'd like to see him explain that one to the wife and kids.

Honesty is the best policy, but sometimes life gives you a break. There's nothing dishonest about taking it.

If a defender hacked a shooter and it wasn't called, would he stop play and inform the ref?

The real heroes wear a different kind of uniform



LISA OLSON

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As Army Spc. Daniel Foster is talking, telling Angels manager Mike Scioscia how it felt to take out enemy suicide bombers and save countless American soldiers from injury and death, Scioscia keeps focusing on Foster's mouth.

"It was hard not to notice," Scioscia says. "We get injuries in our line of work, some pretty severe, but I couldn't help thinking how he got his. Just what he went through that night. Wow."

Foster is missing sections of teeth, and it's easy to spot where his lip was ripped nearly up to his nose, his jawbones shattered top and bottom. He recites the details to Scioscia matter-of-factly, with all the emotion of someone filling out a lineup card: While on guard duty in Afghanistan last spring, Foster heard an approaching cargo truck, identified it as a threat once the driver hit the gas, and fired 30, maybe 40 rounds into the windshield, killing both occupants.

"Then it all got kind of hazy," Foster says. Seems the truck was loaded with 500 pounds of explosives and 41 mortar shells; when they detonated, Foster and others were "lifted out of our shoes and landed on our butts," he says, "shrapnel going everywhere."

He leans down, scratches the leg that bears a tattoo. It's a picture of a cat, surrounded by the words 9 Lives—8 To Go. A few Angels players ask to see it, and they stare at Foster with wonder. He's 22, younger than most of them. They tell him he's a hero, keep shaking his hand. Foster is dead honest when he says he doesn't understand all the fuss.

"Just doing my job," he says to outfielder Torii Hunter. In a few minutes, in a pregame ceremony at Angel Stadium, Foster will receive

the distinguished Silver Star Medal for exceptional valorous conduct while assigned as a machine gunner in Afghanistan, where he displayed heroism and courage beyond the call of duty.

It's the kind of ritual that plays out in stadiums across the land, military men or women who also happen to be huge sports fans are honored for doing things most of us can't fathom. The soldiers are deferential and modest, while the professional athletes drop their cool and do everything but beg for autographs. It's refreshing to see millionaire ballplayers with sweaty palms.

Foster, an Orange County native, can't remember when he wasn't an Angels fan. His passion stuck with him during his first tour, 14 months in Iraq, when he'd follow the team however possible, on transistor radio or with not always frequent peeks at the computer. His devotion often got him through routine late-night guard duty in Afghanistan, when he'd prepare for the six to eight hours by making lists of things to think about before taking the post.

Could the Angels return to 2002 form? They still have a ton of pop in their outfield, beginning with Hunter, Foster would think as he scoured the desert for signs of trouble.

What about the Angels' bullpen? Can it operate without a legit closer? Foster would remind himself that Scioscia is a magician, that the rotation was still solid. He couldn't wait to see the geysers erupt in left center field, the Rally Monkeys, the massive red Angels hats. He'd think about this and so much more as he manned that guard post, the last line of defense preventing enemies from breaching his unit's compound.

Foster was just about to change shifts in the early hours of May



The Angels were amazed by the courage of Foster (right), but he says he was just doing his job.

21, 2010, when he heard the truck approaching, its engines revving. Behind him were barracks filled with American soldiers, and another area housing friendly Afghan troops. Foster's quick action stopped the initial suicide bomb attempt, but then the truck exploded, propelling shrapnel into his body and shattering his jaw.

Through the smoke he somehow rose and continued to fight for another 20 minutes, stopping at least one other suicide bomber who had a mortar strapped to his chest. Still under fire, blood and death everywhere, Foster reckons he got

off several hundred more rounds—superiors later told him he killed three more attackers—until finally a medic forced a straw into Foster's mouth so he could breathe.

"Still have trouble eating," Foster tells Scioscia, who shakes his head. Foster needs four more surgeries on his mug, but that's not what he's dwelling on as he's cited for "gallantry in action against an enemy."

No, as he stands on the grass at the stadium of his dreams, awash in applause and backslaps from players, he thinks of his fellow soldiers on the other side of the world. He wonders if they know how much they're valued.

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